

Old Sleuth Library

DOWN IN A COAL MINE.
By OLD SLEUTH.

A SERIES OF THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED.

No. 48

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DOWN IN A COAL MINE; OR, THE MYSTERY OF THE FIRE DAMP. BY OLD SLEUTH.



"There'll be blood spilled to-night, Ralston, unless something is done to pacify the men," said Sandie.

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„Die Deutsche Library.“

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DOWN IN A COAL MINE;

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THE MYSTERY OF THE FIRE DAMP.

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CHAPTER I.

"THERE'LL be blood spilled to-night, Ralston, unless something is done to pacify the men!"

The person addressed—who was the boss of the engine room—at the mouth of the shaft, glanced at the anxious face of the speaker with an air of surprise, as he said:

"What makes you think so, Carmichael?"

"How can a man think differently, and use his eyes and ears?"

The look of surprise upon the engineer's face turned into one of undisguised suspicion, as he fastened his eyes keenly upon Carmichael, and said abruptly:

"Look, my man, I don't understand this!"

"Don't understand what?"

"I don't understand you!"

"Well, I ain't the subject of conversation just now. I tell you there's trouble brewing, and you had better heed my warning, or there'll be blood shed before morning!"

"Are you an escaped jail-bird, Carmichael?" said the engineer, as he laid down his oil-can, and looked straight into the eyes of the former.

A startled look of terror flashed out from beneath the grim visage of the miner's face, as he replied, with nervous earnestness: "Tut, man, what business is it o' thine, what I be?"

"No business, probably, Sandie Carmichael; but it's a suspicious circumstance, when a man who has all along used the slang of the miner, suddenly speaks in as fine English as a gentleman."

"Ye have no right to question or suspect me, since I have always performed my duty, Jack Ralston!"

"But you must admit that the fact I have just mentioned is very suspicious."

"It's none o' thy business, if it be; I have taken my life in my hands, to warn you of coming danger. Ye can heed it, or disregard it; my conscience is clear!"

"I do intend to take heed," Ralston said; "and you must excuse words which were prompted by sudden surprise. Come, man," he added, "make a confidant of me, and you may secure a friend."

"If you suspect me, you would not readily believe a reasonable explanation?"

"I might."

"Circumstances, in which was mingled no crime, drove me to become a miner, and I thought not to excite the envy of my fellow-workmen by seeming to be better than they."

"Here's a hand, my good man; I believe you are a true-hearted fellow. I know that you meant to act a true man's part just now; the manager is already on his guard."

"And ye knew that the men were growling and threatening?"

"We did. At this instant a shadow was thrown through the open window against the opposite wall of the engine-room. Carmichael was about to speak again, when the engineer put his finger to his lips warningly, then motioned significantly, intending to indicate that there were listeners, as he nodded toward the shadow on the opposite wall."

"I have no right to excuse a man from work; you will have to go to the assistant manager," said Ralston, in a loud voice.

"Thankee!" replied Carmichael, as he stepped out from the engine shed, and sauntered down the pathway, toward the road which led up to the collection of tents where the miners resided.

The scene where the above conversation took place was at the mouth of the pit of one of the most extensive coal mines in Pennsylvania. For months past there had been great dissatisfaction among the workmen, but up to the time when our story commences, no attention had been paid to their demands. Daily, for the last few weeks, their mutterings and growls had increased, and now they were giving utterance to dire and bloody threats.

Sandie Carmichael, who had worked about six months in this mine, which was locally designated the Coleman Mines, was not popular among his associates, because of his exclusiveness. Although always pleasant and agreeable when brought in contact with his companions, still, after work hours he never mingled with them, or joined in their games of cards or drinking bouts. Yet his constant good nature had preserved him from any open expression of real enmity, and he had gone daily upon the quiet even tenor of his way, following his own bent without molestation.

Not until the men began to give utterance to bloody threats did he ever attempt to remon-

strate with them; but at length, when bloodshed was threatened, and violence suggested, he, upon several occasions, tried to reason and argue with them.

Upon the night preceding his talk with the engineer, Sandie had been passing along one of the gangways, treading carefully the dark path, without any light, the latter having burned out, when he came abreast of a narrow cut leading into a coal chamber. A faint glimmer of light warned him of the presence of some of his fellow-workmen, and as he drew nearer he overheard words of terrible import, which caused him to stop and listen, without permitting his near presence to become known.

"I tell ye, boys, there's somethin' got to be done."

"Ay, an' I tell ye," spoke another voice, "that the time for beggin' an' coixin' is past!"

A unanimous grunt, and low mutters of approval greeted this last remark, which became louder and more decided as the speaker added: "A hole bored in the head of the manager would let light into the brains o' the owners. What we can't get by fair means we must win by foul. Dang it! my woman's had nothin' but a gown that's been rent to shreds this twelvemonth."

"Ay," spoke up another, "my woman's layin' at death's door, for want of a few visits from the doctor at the town, who'll no come out this way unless he carries back his fee in his pocket, an' I haven't it to give on the beggarly wages for the long hours we have to work below here."

For a moment there was a pause. This was followed by a whispered conference, which compelled Sandie to lay his ear close to the wall to catch their words; and his blood ran cold, as listening, way down there in the depths, he heard the fearful details of a plan to murder the manager of the mines.

Fortunately, Sandie escaped with his terrible knowledge without having been discovered.

Upon ascending the shaft he had stolen by a devious path to the manager's house, and sought an interview with him. But the latter, who had been greatly annoyed by collective and individual deputations from the dissatisfied miners, had become exasperated—his patience was exhausted, and he had given orders that none of

the workmen should be admitted to his presence. Failing to see the manager personally, Sandie had watched an opportunity, and addressed the engineer, as related in the opening paragraphs of our tale.

After the interview, as described, Sandie sauntered down toward the road, determined to make a second attempt to see the manager. The fearful secret which he held burned upon his brain like a consuming fire; he knew that every moment was precious; he had intended to tell what he had learned to the engineer, but the appearance of the tell-tale shadow upon the wall robbed him of his opportunity. One word which might be overheard would make him a marked man, and his life would not be worth a groat.

Sandie was no coward, nor did he fear to lose his life in a good and humane endeavor to save the lives of others, as will be fully demonstrated before the full details of this story are finished; but he did not wish to cast his life away needlessly, and without accomplishing the object for which he intended to risk it; and this was why his secret was unspoken, and he was driven away from his purpose for the present by the shadow, the substance of which he was fortunately warned in time, was not far distant, and was evidently upon his track.

He had but just turned into the road, and had proceeded but a few paces, when he felt a heavy slap upon his back. He turned quickly and warily, and found himself face to face with a tall, brawny fellow, named Brad. This latter was a fierce, brutish, turbulent fellow, the bully and terror, when mad, of his fellow-workmen. He had been nicknamed Thumping Brad, owing to a fashion he had of closing the majority of all of his addresses to his companions with a fearful thump upon the back or shoulder.

"Halloo, Brad!" said Sandie, "is that you?"

"Ay, it's me, an' none other, Mr. Sneak!"

Two bright, red spots tinged the smut-covered face of Sandie, as he answered tartly:

"Be careful, Thumping Brad, to whom you throw your foul names, lest thee may throw an insult to the wrong chap, my man!"

"Blast ye for just what I called ye, Sandie Carmichael; thou'rt a sneak! an' that o' the first water!"

"Get thee thy way, Brad; I'd not quarrel wi' thee!"

"Nay, but thou dursn't quarrel wi' me, nor wi' any other good man; thou'rt not bold enough; there be too much o' the whelp in thy breed! I told thee thou wert a cur, man! an' now I tell thee thou'rt worse!"

"Why do you seek to quarrel wi' me? I am not meddling wi' thee!"

"Ay, but thou'rt not meddling alone wi' me, but wi' all o' the men that are disgraced by working on the same gang wi' thee!"

"How so? If 'tis true what you say, it's unknown to me!"

"Then, what didst thou with Jack Ralston, the engineer?"

"Show me that it's business o' thine, an' I will tell."

"No, but I'll show thee a much better trick than that shortly."

During this excited conversation, the two men had slowly moved along the road, and at the instant Thumping Brad gave utterance to his last threat, they had reached a part of it which wound along beside a steep cliff, at the base of which struggled along its rocky bed a rapid stream which was supplied from the mountain which arose away from the opposite side of the road.

Suddenly Brad grasped his companion by the shoulder, exclaiming:

"Thou'lt go no further, man, until I know what was thy business with the engineer."

"Take your hand off me, Brad, or it will not go well with thee, big and strong as thou art!"

"Ay, and dost thou threaten a man like me, thou spoony offspring o' a strumpet!"

These latter words, including the fearfully foul epithet applied to his mother, had but just left Brad's lips, when Sandie, who was till now striving to draw himself away, stopped suddenly and dealt his wanton insulter a powerful slap upon his cheek.

Surprise and rage struggling for the mastery was expressed upon Brad's countenance as, with a fearful yell, he sprang forward, and attempted to seize his gallant chastiser by the throat.

"Keep back, thou bully, or I'll deal thee worse than thou hast received!" cried Sandie,

as he backed away from his opponent's excited grasp.

CHAPTER II.

As Sandie called out for his rustianly companion to keep back or he would deal more hardly with him, Brad exclaimed:

"Blast ye, man! I'll have thy life for the blow ye gave me!"

"Not mine, Brad, as long as I have an arm to defend myself," replied Sandie.

"Then defend thy head 'gainst that!" And Brad dealt a ponderous blow at Sandie; but instead of receiving it beside his head, as was intended, the latter threw up his arm scientifically, and stopped the blow. Again and again Brad tried to strike, but each time was foiled by the opposing arm of his less powerful but more supple opponent, who only acted upon the defensive, and kept backing away, hoping that his antagonist would tire out and desist, but as each succeeding blow failed, Brad became more furious, and finally, with a horrible oath and a yell like a maniac, he sprang forward to close with Sandie. So suddenly did he make his spring, that the latter was caught; and now commenced a desperate struggle. On one side was strength, rage, and a fierce, murderous energy; on the other suppleness, skill, and coolness, coupled with a noble spirit of resistance against violence and brutality.

To and fro, across the road, the combatants struggled; for an instant they would be upon the very verge of the cliff, apparently liable at any moment to fall over in a death grip, to be dashed to atoms on the rocks below.

The place where this battle between the two miners was occurring, was part way down the hill from the mouth of the shaft, and just beyond the point where it suddenly turned around the bluff, thus screening the combatants from sight, unless they might be discovered by some one coming up the road toward them, or by others down in the valley, but too far distant to interfere.

For ten minutes the struggle for the mastery continued, without any advantages to either of them.

Brad's original design was to throw his opponent down, and then administer a severe and brutal kicking; but at length, in the mad frenzy occasioned by the unexpected resistance which he encountered, his intentions changed, and his wicked brain conceived a terrible project. He was the stronger, as far as man's strength went, and taking advantage of this brute superiority, he wound his great arms about Sandie, and with fierce oaths and threats drew him toward the verge of the abyss. Nearer and nearer he pulled his intended victim, until the latter experienced a full conviction of his enemy's intent, and he said, while gasping for breath, owing to the violence of his exertions:

"You would murder me, Brad?"

"Ay, man, a hundred times."

"You would throw me over the cliff?"

"I surely will, thou whelp."

"Then thy death be upon thine own head, thou man of blood!"

And as Sandie spoke, he gathered himself for one last effort, dropping his arms from his enemy's loins to his hip, he threw one leg forward to assist in obtaining a well-braced footing, then by a superhuman effort, aided by a certain knack, well known to experienced wrestlers, he raised Brad clean off his feet, and threw him quickly forward, so that the major part of the bully's body hung suspended over the cliff. The victory was with Sandie. Brad was powerless, and as his distended eyeballs glared at the fearful depths beneath, a wild scream of terror burst from his lips. He was beyond his balance. Sandie had but to let go his hold, and down he would have shot upon the rocks beneath.

"Promise not to molest me further, Brad, and I'll pull thee back."

"Pull me back, man, for Heaven's sake, lest thou shouldst loose thy hold!"

"I'll not loose my hold until I will. Brad, if you go over the cliff it is at my will!"

"Pull me back, and I'll talk with thee!"

"Nay, man, a word raises thee from thy peril; promise to let me go my way, and go thou thine, an' I'll pull thee back!"

"Back with me, man; ye have my promise!"

As Brad rose to his feet, after having been drawn back from the cliff, he shook himself like a dog just out of the water, and scowling

at Sandie, with a vengeful light in his inflamed eyes, he said, in a low, hoarse mutter:

"Ye hev my promise, Sandie Carmichael, but that bides but this day. I'll be square with thee yet, man, so thou'rt warned to heed thyself."

"I would not have an enemy, Thumping Brad, could I do ought to avoid, but if it so must be that thou and I must live with a bad spirit between us, I am thankful for the warning thou hast given me; thy words mark thee as the aggressor, so I throw back to thee thy warning. I would bid thee also mind thyself, for as thou hast but just learned, to thy sorrow and mortification, I'm not one to be any man's football!"

"Ay, I hev so learned, and I'll not rest until I've cleared me of this defeat, by proving myself the better man o' the two in the end; so good-day to thee, Sandie Carmichael, thou and I will meet again, lest thou'rt the dog I first took thee to be, an' shalt git thee gone through fear o' me."

"I know the latter would please thee best, Thumping Brad, so that thou couldst have a fair chance to boast of thy prowess, with none to dispute thee, and put thee to the proof; but I fear thee not, man, nor more like thee; an' I'll here remain until such time as some besides thy threats drive me hence!"

Brad returned back toward the mouth of the shaft, while Sandie continued his way down the road a short distance, when, turning aside through a pathway which skirted the brow of the hill to his left, he proceeded rapidly toward a substantial-looking house about a quarter of a mile distant, whose peaked roof was partially visible through the opening in the fine grove of trees by which it was surrounded. As Sandie moved along at a rapid pace, his thoughts turned upon the recent struggle, and as he neared the house, found utterance as follows:

"For once I believe in my heart that fortune has smiled upon me. The dark fate which has followed me from my birth seems for once to have overlooked me, and has allowed one ray of sunshine to flash in upon my hitherto shadowed life; but this battle with Thumping Brad, what will come of it? No greater evil, I trust, than the avowed ill-will of that brutal bully. And I believe that there is less danger in his avowed threats than in his secret enmity. Ay, it may bring me friends. I do not believe the man is really liked; he has won the deference of his fellows by his overbearing, threatening behavior. Many of the men may fear him, and thus appear friendly, but I am satisfied that in their hearts they do not like him. Well, well, we will see; there must come a day when this shadow will be lifted from over me, and I can walk the earth again a free, proud man, without a stain upon my character, or otherwise I may find peace and quiet in the grave."

Sandie's further soliloquy was interrupted by the furious barking of a dog, and upon looking up suddenly, he found himself directly opposite the main gate leading to the house. Upon the piazza he beheld, twining the fresh sprouts of running vines about the lattice-work, the most beautiful and merry-looking young lady he had ever seen.

Not until he closed the gate after him with an intentional slam did she become aware of any one's approach, when, turning with a startled look of surprise, which enhanced the charm of her face, she awaited his approach.

"Begging your pardon, miss, may I ask if the boss is at home?"

"Do you mean Mr. Loder?"

"I do."

"He has gone to Philadelphia."

"And when is he to return?"

The young lady was about to reply when a shrill voice called from within:

"Gertie, who on earth are you talking to?"

"A gentleman who is inquiring after Uncle Philip," replied the miss.

"A gentleman!" exclaimed the voice; and there was a hurried step, and the next instant a sharp-featured, cross-eyed woman appeared upon the piazza, and looking about quickly, she added: "A gentleman! why, where is the gentleman? I don't see him!"

"Then you must have grown very near-sighted since I was here last, Aunt Susan."

"Oh, do you call that a gentleman?" exclaimed Aunt Susan, superciliously, as her eyes fell upon Sandie. "Why, dear, that's only a miner! What a start you gave me!"

An indignant flush mantled Miss Gertie's

cheek as she said hotly: "Can't a miner be a gentleman, pray?"

"You silly girl, go into the house at once," said Aunt Susan, half angrily; then turning to Sandie, she said impatiently: "Well, what do you want?"

"I wish thee'd tell me when the superintendent will return."

"I can't tell you; he may not be home for a week yet."

"Don't tell me that. He will be loose in the mines before that time!" involuntarily exclaimed Sandie.

At this instant a scream of terror was heard within the house, when, without answering Sandie's last remark, Aunt Susan rushed in, leaving the miner to wonder whether anything had happened to that angel-faced, sweet-voiced young creature who had called him a gentleman.

CHAPTER III.

As previously intimated, there was a mystery surrounding Sandie Carmichael. As far as his fellow-workmen were concerned, the mystery consisted only in his unvarying exclusiveness, and owing to this exclusiveness, those who would have been apt and able to detect something beyond this peculiarity saw little of him. Ralston, who was quite an intelligent man, had observed that there was a cause for this strange action, more than appeared upon the surface; and as it is natural in the majority of cases for man to put the worst construction upon his fellow-man's acts, it was so in this case; and up to the morning of the day that he had been addressed by Sandie in relation to trouble among the workmen, he had looked upon him as a probable criminal, who was hiding from the officers of the law. But that conversation led Ralston to think otherwise, and he made up his mind to seek the man's friendship and confidence, for he was now convinced that he had a history, and concluded, also, that it was not a common or ordinary one either.

Had Ralston been present when Aunt Susan rebuked her niece for calling him a gentleman, and seen the strange look which, for a moment, illuminated the miner's face, he would have been still more mystified, and have experienced a greater anxiety to learn more of his previous history.

It was some five minutes before Aunt Susan returned to the piazza, after having been called into the house by the scream. During this interval Sandie stood nervously kicking the dirt in the pathway with the toe of his boot, while ever and anon he would look anxiously toward the house, plainly betraying his readiness to rush in and be of service if necessary.

Looking at him scornfully, she said:

"Well, haven't you gone yet?"

"I have not, lady. I am anxious to know definitely at what time you expect Mr. Loder to return?"

"I told you once that I did not know. You men from the mines are getting very troublesome of late."

"An' I fear that more lately they are getting dangerous, my lady."

Instantly the face of the woman became deathly pale: she had noticed the earnest and solemn manner in which the miner had spoken, and a wild thrill of terror trembled through her heart, as she comprehended the import of his words.

Aunt Susan was the manager's maiden sister; she was a resolute woman, about five-and-forty years of age, who had come to keep house for her brother upon the death of his wife, some twelve years previous; and during the twelve years that she had lived with him she had passed through many scenes of sorrow and peril. Three children, in quick succession, had followed their mother to the grave, and the eyes of each of these dear little ones had been closed by this faithful woman. Then, again, she had ministered for months beside her brother's sick-bed, after he had been brought home to her one night, bleeding and mangled by some parties who had never been discovered. Beneath her sharp, brusque, impatient manner was hidden a truly noble disposition, and when real troubles came, this woman, who could be easily irritated by a mere trifle, would become as patient and enduring as the most self-sacrificing heroine. She had one weakness marring her otherwise noble character—she had an unwarranted dislike and contempt for miners. Without stopping to study causes and effects, she looked upon them as ignorant and turbulent,

and was blinded to the more excellent qualities which they possessed, and which predominated.

One week previous to the opening of our story, her niece, an orphan, and the only child of her brother who had died in California, had come on from the Golden City to reside permanently with her and her brother, the latter having been appointed guardian and the sole executor of the estate which had been left by his brother; and this orphan niece was the beautiful young girl who had dazzled the sight of the miner upon his first approach, and who had irritated her aunt by calling him a gentleman.

Her first address to Sandie, when she had sufficiently recovered from the shock after the comprehension of the significant meaning of his last words, were more considerate and less impatient. She said:

"Have you come to threaten, or as a friend, to warn Mr. Loder?"

"I have come as a friend."

"Well, what have you to communicate? If I deem it of sufficient importance, I will telegraph for my brother at once."

"I think you hadst better do so, then, lady, for I can assure thee that the danger is imminent."

"Tell me why you think so?"

"Well, I must tell thee, then, in confidence, but thou canst rely upon what I tell thee. The men are greatly exasperated, an' there have been emissaries from the Carbondale and other districts, an' they have added fuel to the flames; and along wi' that, Thumping Brad, who at all times is an evil-disposed man, has been secretly and constantly working to increase the men's dissatisfaction and incite them to some deed of violence; and from a conversation I overheard yestereen, I am convinced that he has succeeded, and at any moment an outbreak may be expected. To-morrow, if thee will remember, is pay-day, and when the men get inflamed with liquor, two or three such scamps as Brad can easily incite them to any deed of violence. This, my lady, is the truth, an' I think the peril is great."

For some moments Susan Loder was lost in thought; at length she said, at the same time fastening her eyes keenly upon the face of Sandie:

"Can you be trusted to carry a dispatch to the town, and see that it is sent off?"

"I will pledge my life, my lady, to do faithful whatever you may require."

"I think I can trust you; but where is Mr. Tilton, the assistant manager?"

"He left the mines last night, so I have been told, to attend the funeral of a relative."

"And Mr. Ralston, the engineer?"

"He is aware that the men are dissatisfied, but does not know the danger which momentarily threatens him."

"Would you oblige me by going to the shaft and conveying a message to Mr. Ralston?"

"I would willingly do so, but it would be dangerous. If I could advise thee, lady, it would be better to let me go with the dispatch at once, and avoid loss of time."

Again Aunt Susan thought for a moment, and at length said:

"Well, I will trust you, and will go at once and write a dispatch."

In a few moments Miss Loder returned, and handing what she had written to Sandie, she gave him specific directions, and concluded with the inquiry:

"Do you think there is any danger to be apprehended to-night?"

"No, not until after the men are paid off to-morrow."

"But if my brother does not return they will not be paid."

"They will take the afternoon for a holiday, at any rate, an' their not being paid will make them the more violent and quarrelsome."

"Well, you are right; and you shall not lose anything for your good conduct. Now speed thee to the town; here is money to pay your livery hire."

"Thank you, lady," said Sandie, humbly, and he turned away.

Five hours subsequent to the parting between Sandie and the manager's sister, the former was driving along slowly toward the village, after having performed his errand successfully, when, just as he came to a place where the mountain torrent had cut a narrow gorge, the bottom of which, now dry, was on a level with the road, he was suddenly startled by seeing the shadow of a man thrown across his way, directly in front, as the moon for a moment shot over a clear space between two rapidly drifting clouds.

Clapping his hand in his pocket, he drew forth a pistol, and jerking his horse up suddenly, he leaped from his wagon, and with weapon ready cocked, said, in a calm, steady voice:

"Who goes there?"

CHAPTER IV.

"Hist!" called a low voice, as Sandie advanced toward his horse's head. "Old Joe is miner's friend!" continued the voice.

"Oh, is that you, Joe? Alack, man! but you gave me a great start stealing out so stealthily from the mouth of that gorge."

"Injun is miner's friend; miner was kind to Injun, gave Injun bread; miner's life is in danger, Injun come to tell him!"

"Aha! that is how the land lays, is it, Joe? Well, I am under obligation to thee, man, certainly."

"Miner gave Joe bread, and Joe is miner's friend."

"Speak out, man. From what quarter comes the danger?"

"This afternoon, Joe lay asleep at the shebang; miners come in, two, three, more come; by and by they all thought Injun was drunk and asleep—couldn't hear nothing; Injun always sleep with one eye open, never closes both eyes. Miners have a talk, they say Sandie is an informer, a spy. Thumping Brad he told them so; then the miners got mad, and swore vengeance, and make a plan to kill you, and then they will go to the house of Mr. Loder, and burn it."

"Prithee, man, but this is fearful news ye have brought!"

"Joe was not a sleep; Injun heard it all; miners thought Joe was drunk."

"Do they know that I am upon this road to-night?"

"Yes; and they are ambushed for you up near the shaft of the old burned coal mine."

"That is certainly an excellent place to select for the commission of murder!"

"Yes; road goes through the mountains there, white man couldn't escape nohow."

"And you say, man, that after they have murdered me it is their intention to burn the superintendent's house down?"

"That is what they agreed upon; Injun heard them."

"How did they know I was coming this road?"

"Thumping Brad had a spy upon your track—Aston's boy was sent to watch your movements."

"Did they know the errand which took me to town?"

"Yes."

"Alack, man! but all this is serious. Are the men filled with liquor?"

"No—not all; some are, others filled with mad—they all swear to kill you."

Joe was a perfect type of the old-time Indian; quick to revenge a wrong, and equally quick and steadfast in rendering a service for a service; and this was the reason that he had come to meet Sandie and warn him of impending danger. Upon numerous occasions, the latter had treated him kindly.

Like the majority of his race, this old chief was shrewd and cunning, and possessed originally such a powerful and vigorous frame, that, seemingly, neither time nor the hundreds of debauches upon which he had been appeared to have impaired his strength in the least.

For a moment after Joe's last remark nothing was said. Sandie revolved the situation in his mind; he was not a coward, but no man, no matter how brave, will willingly advance toward certain death when no good purpose is to be served, and then the odds, as in this case, were twenty to one against him. Had it not been for one statement the Indian had made, Sandie would have turned back, and would have waited until daylight before attempting to return to the mining village, but Joe had said that it was the intention of the malcontents to kill him, and then burn the superintendent's mansion. Another unfortunate circumstance was the fact that there was but one road to the mines. There was no roundabout way to return except on foot, and that was a dangerous and circuitous path across the mountains, where, in the darkness, a traveler would run the risk of being precipitated down numerous shafts which had been sunk here and there by speculators searching for coal beds. There were also precipices over which one might unwittingly walk, and be dashed to death on the rocks below.

At length, after thoroughly considering all the chances, Sandie determined to send Joe back with the horse and wagon toward the town, with instructions to return upon the following morning, while he undertook to reach the village on foot, and he said:

"Joe, my man, I must reach the village to-night at all hazards."

"Then you must go across the mountain; can't take horse and wagon across the mountain."

"No; but I can leave the horse and wagon with you, and then trip over the mountain on foot."

"Better wait until morning; no safe to go over the mountain to-night; no moon; no stars; miner walk to death, certain."

"No, I know the road pretty well, and I will be careful; my eyes are good."

"Good eyes no good when white man got no stars; leave horse, and Injun will go too. Injun find the way without stars."

"No, I can not leave the horse; you must drive back toward town, and bring the horse up in the morning."

"Injun white man's friend, and will do what white man says; but better take Injun's advice, never cross the mountain safe to-night!"

"Then I must perish in the attempt; I will cross the mountain, or go ahead and take my chances with the enemy in front."

"No chance in front; too many—ten, twenty miners; Sandie get killed certain."

"Then I will cross the mountain. You say you are my friend; if you are you will do what I want you."

"Injun is Sandie's friend, and will do what white man wants."

"Very well, man, you return to town with the horse, I will give you money to pay for his keep; I must cross the mountain."

The Indian ceased to offer any further protest, and after some further instructions he jumped into the wagon and turned the horse's head toward the town, while the intrepid miner ascended the bank beside the road, and disappeared like a shadow in the direction of the mountain.

After the disappearance of Sandie, through the darkness, on his way over the mountain, Indian Joe drove on a short distance toward the town, when suddenly turning the horse's head about, he muttered:

"Injun is Sandie's friend; Injun's friend is in danger; Injun must not be away. Joe will drive to the village; miners at the shaft won't kill Joe, Injun no enemy—yes, Injun will go back."

Knowing exactly where the intended murderers lay in ambush, he resolved to alight when he neared that point, and approach them on foot, so as to let them know that he was not the man whose life they sought.

The night was pitchy dark, and as he rode along the road became rougher and narrower as it wound between the mountains whose rocky sides rose abruptly on either side. It was a full mile from where he turned to the place by the sunken shaft, where the miners lay concealed; and owing to the roughness of the road and the darkness, he made but slow progress. But at length he became aware, by observing objects which stood out prominently, and were indistinctly visible in spite of the darkness, that he was nearing the vicinity of the deserted shaft, and springing from his seat he jumped out upon the ground, and was advancing toward the horse's head, when suddenly the deathly stillness was broken by a fierce yell, succeeded by a blasphemous oath. A dark object hovered an instant in the air over his head, then descended swiftly, cutting the darkness. There was heard a dull thud, and the faithful Indian fell in a heap upon the ground, as, with muttered oaths, a number of dark figures sprang upon either side, and like so many shadows of evil omen, gathered about him.

CHAPTER V.

"AWAY with him to the shaft!" exclaimed he who appeared to act as leader to this gang of murderers.

"What will we do with the horse and wagon, Brad?" inquired one of the men.

"Blast the horse and wagon, man! Away, I bid ye, and throw the carcass of this informer and spy down the deserted shaft!"

"But the horse and wagon will stand as testimony against us, man, if we don't make way with that, too!"

Taking up the body of Indian Joe, supposing

that it was Sandie Carmichael, but owing to the darkness, unable to discover their mistake, they advanced, bearing it rapidly along the road until they came to a flat plateau, which stretched out upon the side of the road and terminated at the base of the mountain, which here surrounded a small sunken area called Foolish Valley—a name it had earned owing to the many unsuccessful attempts that had been made to sink a shaft which should reach a rich vein of coal, which was supposed to underlie it many feet down.

"I tell thee, men, I like not this part of our bargain!"

"Nor do I," replied another; "a bit of a riot for excitement might serve well enough, but the killing of this man is something different."

"Ay," spoke up a third; "but what's to be done now? Drop the body over the shaft. Alack! but the man's blood is not on thy hands or mine; Brad said it was a thrashing he intended to give him."

"An' that is so, truly," said still another of the miners; "and we have no more to do with the man's murder than they that were not here at all."

"Is the man dead?" inquired one of the men.

"Ay, from the limpness of his limbs, I should say so," replied one of the miners, as he raised one of Indian Joe's arms and let it fall again loosely by his side.

"But wouldn't ye take that as proof that he still had life in him? Tut, man, but I was always told that the limbs of the dead were stark and stiff."

"Ay, man, after a season, but not to night; this chap here is dead, most certainly, and if we toss him down the shaft, we will partake no more of the responsibility of his death than they that attend a funeral."

"I wish I had had none o' this," spoke up one of the men; "I wouldn't have minded a scrimmage, but this, lads, savors too much of a cowardly murder."

"An' that's our way of thinking," cried others in chorus.

At this moment Thumping Brad came stalking toward them. As he saw the body lying at the mouth of the shaft, he exclaimed fiercely:

"A curse upon ye, an' why haven't ye thrown the carcass of the informer over the brink?"

"Tut, man, but thou'rt more impatient than though it were an honorable deed ye had committed, instead of the murder of a man unawares."

"An' call ye be a man who has been a spy upon his companions? Alack, comrade, but thou'rt drawing suspicion upon thyself. May be thou'rt a friend o' the informer?"

"An' thou liest, Thumping Brad, bully as thou'rt always, an' the more a coward!"

"Look you, and see what a coward I am!" and advancing suddenly, Brad seized the body of Joe in his powerful grasp, and raising it aloft, held it a moment over the edge of the pit, suddenly swinging it back for an instant, with a wild oath, he again plunged it forward, let go his hold, and sent the body twirling into the black depths of the shaft.

"Thus perish all traitors! And now, comrades, the night grows apace, let's away to the village; there's more work to be done yet, and we're the jolly boys to do it, too!"

"Ay, ay, Brad, but you're a friend o' the lads all through, an' I'll be one o' more to muzzle the pate o' him who growls. Tut, comrades, are we not men, and haven't we the same right to make war for our rights as one king against another? Ay, but we have."

"Thou'rt right, Brownie!" spoke up several. "An' it's a vote that the lads who have grown chicken-hearted over the death of a bloody spy shall get away to their wives and leave the battle for our rights to them as have more nerve."

"That's the talk!" said Thumping Brad, "but afore ye start, lads, let's understand one another. We want only what is just and right; we have tried fair means to gain our just rights, and we have been met with insults and derision; we have been laughed at where we should have been treated with respect. If a miner don't earn his pay, tell me, lads, who does?"

"Thou'rt right, Brad!" cried a number of the men.

"Ay, I know that I'm right, lads; do we not have to earn our bread fighting both fire and water? Isn't the demon of the fire-damp always lurking in hidden crevices, ready at any moment to spring forth and smother us? Ain't we always in peril of a flooding of the mine, the

explosion of the deadly damp, or its fatal inhalation?"

"Ay, ay, Thumping Brad, you're right!" "Prithee, but don't ye all well know that I am right? And then, what cares the capitalist what becomes of us as long as he gets his dividends? No sooner are our graves filled in over us, than our places in the mine are filled also, and the rich man gets his profits all the same."

"Hear! hear!" shouted the men, now wrought up to a frenzy by the words of Thumping Brad.

And, alas! the miner's words were but too true, although he was a bad man himself, and only used the facts to inflame the miners so as to bring them to favor his own evil designs.

Thumping Brad was naturally a discontented and turbulent fellow; he had been a leader of strikes before, and had learned by experience just the phrases to use to excite and anger better disposed men than himself. It is said that you can not assemble a dozen men together from a promiscuous crowd without finding at least one bad man among them; and therefore it was not strange that, among two hundred miners, Thumping Brad found a few kindred spirits—enough to make a party sufficiently strong to influence their companions.

And these now gathered around and encouraged Brad while making his speech; and so adroitly did the villain word his address, that when the men drew away from the mouth of the pit into which the body of Joe had been thrown, they were so worked upon as to be ripe for any devilish work which he might suggest; and with wild shouts, "Let's away to the house of the manager, and level it by fire!" they hustled and crowded away toward the village.

CHAPTER VI.

THE human heart is a strange and mysterious study; and when Sandie Carmichael started upon his perilous journey across the mountain, humble miner as he was, he was urged forward by the same impulse which, upon many a tented field in ages gone by, has inspired noble knights to mingle in the clash and shock and danger of the journey.

Sandie was in love. During the earlier hours of the day just past, he had become possessed of new hopes, desires, and ambitions. He had gazed upon the lady who had led his heart captive but once, and then only for a few brief moments; and yet that one brief glance had left an impression which was to remain until the grave covered all of his earthly hopes and desires.

An intonation of a voice, a peculiar smile, an expression which betrayed a certain trait of character, or emotion, or longing of the heart has, in millions of cases, captured the affections of another heart, and held them through long after-years of suffering and trial; and thus it was with Sandie Carmichael, the collier; it was not the beautiful face or the lovely form of the creature that had made his heart throb with a new sensation—it was the kindly tones in which a voice had expressed surprise that any one should doubt that a man could be a miner and also a gentleman.

Under ordinary circumstances Sandie would not have attempted a passage across the mountain, but one clause of Indian Joe's information would have caused him to walk straight into the jaws of death, if, by the sacrifice of his own life, he could be of service to another.

The night, as previously stated, was unusually dark, and Sandie, who was a comparative stranger, had only traveled the mountain but once, and was consequently compelled to depend more upon chance, good fortune, and instinct, than his eyesight and any prior knowledge of the road.

Still bravely upward and onward through the darkness he clambered over the rough and circuitous path, never halting nor hesitating, one thought only animating his heart—a desire to reach the manager's house before the strikers.

After a two hours' walk, without accident or alarm, he came in sight of the lights of the village. His face was pale and his breath short and quick, as he glanced in the direction where the manager's house was situated. He feared that he might see the flames roaring in full blast, or else behold the smoldering ruins. But no; no lights were visible, but the few dim lights which cast their faint rays through the miners' cottage windows.

"Thank God!" cried Sandie, with reverent enthusiasm, "there is a chance that I may yet be in time!"

The lights in the cottage windows served as a guide; and by their aid Sandie was enabled to increase his pace, as he had passed over the most dangerous portion of the way, and a few moments brought him to the road. But just as he slipped down the bank, a sound smote upon his ear which sent a shudder through his frame; it was the yells and shouts of the strikers now just returning. Wild laughter, mingled with oaths and curses, plainly proved that they were maddened with liquor.

"They're crazy drunk!" was Sandie's audible comment. "They have been carousing at the Devil's drinking-place down the road, and now that their reason and sense have fled, they will be ripe for any kind of wantonness. I must away to Ralston's. I'll be no match for those drunken demons alone and unaided."

With a quick, vigorous step, Sandie hastened away toward Ralston's lodgings. Having arrived there, he rapped at the cottage door; the engineer opened it himself.

"Ah! is that you, Carmichael?" exclaimed the engineer, in surprise. "Why, man, what brings you here at such an hour? Is anything wrong?"

"Ay, sir; I fear there will much wrong be done before morning; a gang of men under the lead of Thumping Brad are already on the way to burn Mr. Loder's house!"

"Great heavens!" cried Ralston, "is this true?"

"Ay, only too true! and lest you and I be quick, their devilish work will be accomplished before we can fly to the rescue, and then our chances will be slight for saving the house. There are at least twenty of them, and they are all mad with rum."

Shortly after, Ralston and Sandie started for the house of the manager, resolved at least to warn and rescue the family, if unable to do more.

When they reached that part of the road where Sandie and Thumping Brad had had their encounter, upon looking over the side of the cliff, they beheld a sight which filled them with the direst apprehension; marching in procession, headed by several of the men bearing torches, were at least one hundred of the miners.

"They're in full headway for mischief now, Mr. Ralston," said Sandie.

"Yes; and unless we take a short cut across the road, they will reach Loder's before us; they will go to the lower road and cross the fields from the stream."

"I fear the house is doomed, Mr. Ralston."

"There is once chance still remaining to save it; you hasten to the house and remove Miss Loder and the young lady to my lodgings, and I will meet the men and try and pacify them for the present."

The two men now separated. Ralston started off on a run down the road, while Sandie branched off through a pathway toward the manager's residence.

CHAPTER VII.

"RAP! rap! went Sandie's fist against the door of the manager's house, and after a few moments a sash was raised and a female voice called out:

"Who's there? and what is wanted?"

"You are in danger, lady," cried Sandie; "the men have become excited with rum, and are marching like so many demons toward this house. More than once they have threatened that they would burn it. I have come to warn you."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Miss Loder; "what shall we do?"

"You had better arouse all the inmates at once and come down, when I'll lead you to a place of safety until the excitement is over."

"I will not leave the house! I shall stay and defend it!"

"It would be better, lady, that the house should burn than that ye should lose your lives."

"I have met rioters before; I will not fly without an effort to save my brother's property."

"And will you have the young lady I saw here to-day remain and run the risk of being abused and insulted?"

"Mercy! I had forgotten about Gertie."

"Ay, but I thought thou wert thinking more of the house, lady; but if I could advise thee, I would say that the chances would be better to save the house, if you would seek safety with thy niece."

"I will think of it; but will you cross over the rear lot and summon Mike? And by the time you return with him we will be ready for whatever may appear best to do."

When Sandie returned, after rousing Mike, he found Miss Loder and her niece, with their servant, on the piazza; they were cowering at one side, watching with terror a group of miners, who had come to a halt and were apparently holding a consultation, on the brow of a hill about half a mile distant across lots.

The torches which they carried revealed them plainly, and in the flickering light they looked like so many ghouls come forth from the caverns of the earth.

Unconsciously Miss Loder felt herself constrained to put implicit confidence in Sandie; and when Mike joined them, she directed that he should remain with Sandie, to protect the house, while she and Gertie sought the residence of the assistant manager.

"But will you dare to go alone?"

"Certainly," replied Miss Loder; "and were it not for Gertie, I would dare to remain!"

"The men are in motion again, Mike," said Sandie, after the females were gone.

"Whist, now, Sandie, me boy, what's this?" and as Mike spoke, he seized the miner by the shoulder with one hand, turned him around, and with the other pointed to a dark form stealing along by the garden pickets.

"I'll soon find out what and who it is," said Sandie, as he stepped off the stoop and stealthily advanced toward the mysterious figure. As he neared the gate, he saw the man, for as such he now recognized the object, crouched down beside the gate.

"Who is there?" said Sandie.

"Indian Joe, white man's friend."

"Alack, man, is that you?" cried Sandie, in surprise. "Why, I thought you had gone back to town with the horse."

"The horse is lost—Joe almost lost, too."

"Why, man, how is that? What befell you?"

"Injun white man's friend—Injun 'fraid white man be in danger—Injun no drive to town—turn toward village—miners met Injun—strike him on the head with a club. Ugh! Injun know nothing—first Injun know, falling down shaft—Injun caught something—no fall—climb up—see miners go 'way—Injun follow—Injun here to help his friend."

From the Indian's manner Sandie inferred that he had met with an adventure.

"Are you badly hurt, Joe?"

"No; Injun only stunned—Injun got hard head—ugh! Injun knows who struck him!"

At this moment Sandie recognized the approach of another person, who proved to be the inside boss. The man had evidently been running hard, and for a moment could not speak; but upon recovering his breath, he said:

"Are you Carmichael?"

"That is my name."

"All right! I have just come from Mr. Ralston's house, and was told that he had come down here with you."

"Yes; he started from the house with me, but we separated at the ledge; the men have been excited, and are now maddened with liquor, and as there is a rumor that they intend to burn the manager's mansion, he has gone down to try and persuade them from their evil purpose."

"I wish him luck; but I have not much faith in his success. I have been among the men, and they are dead set in their purpose."

"Thou'rt of the same opinion as myself; and how stand you in the matter, dare you take a hand against them to save Mr. Loder's property?"

"Yes, I dare; I will lose my life before they shall burn a picket with my consent."

"Then I bid thee welcome, man, for there's going to be hot work, methinks, before day-light."

"Ay, thou'rt right; already they are upon the march again; the engineer has been unable to restrain them!" and the foreman pointed toward the advancing torches.

"I wish Ralston was with us."

"Finding that he has failed with them, he may hasten here; a sober man steps quicker than those reeling drunkards."

The four men now passed around to the rear of the house, and watched the approach of the strikers; after a few moments they saw the figure of a solitary man coming toward them.

"There comes Ralston," said the foreman.

"I hope thou'rt right, man, for we need his presence sorely."

"Ay, but I am right, for it is him surely."

The foreman was correct in his surmise, and in a moment Ralston joined them.

"Who have we here?" he exclaimed, as he approached.

"Four determined men, besides yourself," replied Sandie.

CHAPTER VIII.

"STAND!"

Thus called Ralston from the second-story window of the manager's house, as the yelling, reeling miners came crowding across the rear lawn.

The voice of the engineer was at once recognized, and the decided and imperative manner in which he spoke caused the men for a moment to come to a halt. Brad, their leader, was furious. He cursed and threatened, and urged his followers forward.

"Hang ye!" he fairly screamed, "for a lot of cravens and cowards, that ye should be frightened by the voice of one man. Away with ye, and toss yer firebrands through the windows, and level the grasping millionaire's house with the ground!"

"Ay, Brad; but there may be more than the engineer within the house, and they have the law with them, too."

"Take that, ye yelping cur," shouted Brad, in a towering rage, as he struck the miner who had spoken a heavy blow on the head with his sputtering torch.

"Blast ye, Brad, would ye set me afire?" exclaimed the miner, fiercely.

"Ay, that I would, a thousand times, an' thou dost not hold thy prate, thou descendant of a race of 'bleaters'."

"Thou'rt a liar, Brad! big as thou'rt, man, an' that to thy teeth, too."

"And I have no time to parley, lest I'd unhinge thy jaws for calling me a liar; but go take the brand, and fire the house as I bid ye!"

"An' hast thou not a brand in thine own hand? Go thou an' fire the house, an' not ask others to do what thou fearest thyself."

The men had all awaited the issue of this sudden outbreak between Brad and one of their companions.

"What ails the man, Brad?" inquired one of his followers.

"Baste him over the head again with your torch!" cried another.

"Send him home to his wife and the rest of the women!" cried a third.

"You had better all return to your wives and the rest of the women," called Ralston; "or it may be that some of you may never return!"

"Come out o' the house, man, an' thou would save thy life."

"No; I will not come out, men; and you will find yourselves better off to take my advice against those who would urge you to violence!"

"You will burn with the house an' ye don't come out, man!"

"Nay; but I'll send a ball into the brain of the man who comes a step nearer the house with a blazing brand! We are armed, and will use our weapons, too, in defense of the property."

"We must let them know that we are in earnest," said Ralston, as he raised his cocked pistol and fired at a man who was just preparing to fling his torch.

One shriek of agony succeeded the engineer's shot, and then followed a moment of death-like stillness.

When Ralston fired, for a moment the men were paralyzed with surprise, and they gathered around their wounded comrade to learn the extent of his wound. It took but a moment to satisfy themselves that the man was dying; already, as they held their torches near his face, they recognized the ashen paleness of approaching death.

The man was beyond the power of speech, but he was evidently perfectly conscious, as his eyes rolled restlessly, and several times he tried to use his fluttering breath to say something. But no, he could not; and finally he drew one long gasp, and then his eyes assumed the wild and steady stare of death, his jaw fell, a slight, nervous tremor came over his frame, and all was over. To him the great mystery of the beyond was no longer a mystery; he had passed from the riot and gloom, and violence of the last few hours into a Presence where the miner and the king are judged alike, and where all of the wrongs of mortality are impartially adjusted, and where the wealth and capital of the whole universe can not affect the even bal-

ance of justice one "jot nor tittle." Here the miner and the director stand equal before divine law.

One of the miners had been kneeling beside the wounded man, and the moment he saw that all was over, he arose to his feet and said:

"Mates, I'd rather matters had not come to this pass, an' I call upon all of ye to bear witness that up to this moment I had counseled peace; but now!" and the miner's face assumed a terrible expression as he repeated, "but now the blood of our murdered mate calls for vengeance!"

"Ay, ay! Hear! hear!" shouted the balance of the men, and again, with wild shouts, they advanced toward the house.

During the time that the rioters had been gathered around their dying companion, Sandie and his companions had ascended to the roof, and also had ventured out of the doors at other places, and had extinguished all of the burning torches. While they were still upon the lower balcony, the man who was addressing the miners had just concluded his speech, and as the men made a rush toward the house, they saw the men, who were just about to re-enter.

"Blast them!" shouted several of the men; "those are the chaps that fired upon our mate!" And they made a dash at them. Sandie's companions were already within the hall, but the latter had lingered a moment to kick a burning brand off the stoop, and had but just turned when the men were upon him. Realizing at once that he could not reach the door, Sandie turned to face the men, intending to struggle until the last; but the instant the men caught sight of his features, by the aid of their torches, they all started back with exclamations of terror, as though a gaping chasm had suddenly opened at their feet.

"A wraith! a wraith!" yelled one of them.

"A what?" cried Thumping Brad.

"Sandie Carmichael's ghost!—the man we threw down the deserted shaft!" was the answer.

"Go thou to thy home, Brad, and call off these men that thou dost lead to wrong, or it will be the worse for thee, man!" Sandie cried.

"Blast ye, Sandie Carmichael! ye can not frighten me! By some miracle it seemeth that thou'rt still in the land of the living!" And as Brad spoke, he made a lunge at Sandie, but the latter sprang back, slipped and fell against the door, which, not having been fastened, yielded, and let him fall forward upon the floor of the hallway.

"Come on, lads!" shouted Thumping Brad, as he rushed in the door, and planted his heavy foot on Sandie's breast before he could rise to his feet. "Come on, mates," he repeated, "the citadel is ours! down with the dainty home of a miser and oppressor!"

Seeing Brad within the door, a large number of the men who did not know what had driven their companions back, rushed forward with wild shouts of triumph and exultation. In the meantime, Brad had made an effort to fasten his foot upon Sandie's neck. The latter struggled manfully, but having been taken at a disadvantage, and having injured one of his arms in his fall, he finally felt that he would have to give up the struggle, when, just at that instant, a dark figure stole down the stairway, and Thumping Brad received a blow which sent him prostrate across the door-way, right at the feet of the advancing miners who had come to his assistance.

Ralston and the inside boss, hearing the tumult in the hall below them, and judging that the men had effected an entrance, also came rushing down-stairs; and as Sandie and Brad were raised to their feet by their respective friends, a terrible struggle began in the passage. Oaths, curses, and yells of pain were mingled as the fierce contest progressed in the darkness. Suddenly a lurid light was flashed upon the combatants, and a wild chorus arose without, as with shouts of demoniac laughter and triumph, the cry sped from mouth to mouth: "The place is on fire!"

CHAPTER IX.

In one brief hour, succeeding the significant shout recorded in our last chapter, the once handsome residence of Mr. Loder, the manager, was a mass of smoking ruins; and within that brief hour also two brave men had been terribly injured, and possibly maimed for life. With the fire raging about them on every side, the infuriated miners had continued the assault within the hallway of the house, and the de-

fenders had maintained a stubborn resistance. Ralston and the inside boss at length fell, battered and bleeding, upon the floor; the fire had now gained such headway that their assailants were compelled to fly or risk being suffocated, and the fierce battle ceased.

Sandie and Indian Joe carried their wounded companions out and bore them away; fortunately, in the excitement, being enabled to do so without attracting attention, as in the confusion it was impossible to recognize friend from foe.

The flames had been seen from the village, and had attracted hither crowds of women and their older children; and as is usually the case, the reason assigned for the firing of the mansion was the death of a miner by Ralston's shot. The cause which led to the discharge of the weapon was entirely ignored, and the newcomers, and more especially the women, were greatly excited and indignant, and as a matter of course applauded the burning of the house.

At last the day dawned. The scene of the events just recorded was in an entirely new district. The mine had been but six months in what might be termed really successful operation, and in the immediate vicinity of the working there was nothing but wild and unbroken country, and the many schemes already commenced to bring the village in more timely communication with the more settled districts had not yet been completed.

The nearest town was eleven miles distant, over a new, rough, and dangerous road. A cutting had already been commenced for a branch railroad, which was to connect the mines with the main road, and thus send the product of the mines in a more rapid and direct route to the seaboard cities. At present it was transported in cars over tramways on the opposite side of the mountain to the river, where it was loaded upon boats and carried many hundreds of miles in a roundabout way. This total isolation of the mines favored the riotously disposed miners, and thus it was that without any molestation, except from the brave Ralston and his companions, they were enabled to carry on their work of destruction.

When the assistant manager returned, about noon upon the day following the night of the riot, he was astonished at what had occurred.

He heard the miners' story first. Their version of the affair was that they had gone to Mr. Loder's house to present a petition in a peaceable manner, without knowing that he was away, and that while crossing the lawn, without a word of warning, they were fired upon, and one of their number killed; then, in the excitement of the moment, they proceeded to extremes, and smarting under a sense of wrong and outrage, fired the house.

The first thing the assistant manager did was to imperatively forbid the sale of any more liquor to the men, and being a humane and just man, he had all the workmen assembled at the pay office, when he made a conciliatory address, urging them to return to work and await quietly and peaceably the principal manager's return, when he doubted not matters could be agreeably settled to the satisfaction of all concerned.

A part of the men appeared disposed to follow the assistant manager's advice, and would have returned to work, had not Thumping Brad, and the few unruly spirits who fully sympathized with him, again interfered with their pernicious counsels.

During the course of the afternoon Sandie Carmichael had occasion to go to the village upon an errand for Miss Loder. The latter did not think of the risk that the friendly miner would run, or she would not have sent him; neither would Sandie have gone, were it not that he was a brave man, who could not be frightened off from his purpose by a merely threatened danger.

Upon the night previous, when Miss Loder and Gertie had started to a place of refuge from the fury of the mob, the latter had inquired concerning Sandie, and what his position was in the mine.

"He is but a simple miner," replied Miss Loder.

"He is more than a simple miner in reality," said Gertie, in significant tones.

"This idea of yours is merely the fanciful romance of a young girl; because this man has shown himself brave and generous, you wish to make a hero of him at once; but, my dear child, bravery among miners is such a common quality, that if we should surround every brave and generous one among them with a halo of

romance, we should have our mines filled with heroes, and not ordinary brave, steadfast men."

"You are not very observant, my dear aunt, or you would have recognized equally as soon as I did a reason for believing that the man Sandie has a history."

"Well, what do you observe so remarkable about him, Gertie?"

"I observed that when he first spoke to you he used the ordinary idiom of the miners; but when he became earnest, he spoke with the nicety and correctness of a courtier; and in spite of the grim and smut upon his features, his eyes beamed with intelligence far above his seeming condition."

"Fudge, Gertie! you are a romantic young girl! Even admitting what you say is true, what does it prove?"

"It proves that for some reason the man is living an assumed character; that he is a well-educated man, trying to conceal the fact, and only at times unwittingly betrays himself. That man, aunt, is living a disguised life."

"That may all be true, Gertie; it is not an unusual thing for criminals, fugitives from justice, to seek refuge in the mines. A man of this character was arrested in one of the mines which your uncle superintended some years ago, and he proved to be a man not only well educated, but one who had once been wealthy, and had moved in the highest circles of society. He was formerly a bank president, who had turned out a defaulter. He was a miner for two years before he was discovered and arrested."

"But do you think, aunt, that this man's conduct, of whom we are speaking, has evinced anything which would indicate a criminal heart?"

"Well, Gertie, I do not wish to pierce the glamour of romance which you are trying to throw around an ordinary miner, who has merely performed a conscientious duty, but I will tell you that this extemporized hero of yours is noted as one of the most slovenly men about the mines. He is nicknamed 'Dirty-faced Sandie,' from the fact that no one has ever seen him with what might be called a really clean face. He may be a hero, Gertie, but he is a dirty-faced one, and consequently can not amount to much after all."

As Gertie was about to reply, the subject of their conversation appeared, coming around the side of the house. Miss Loder called to him, and when he approached, she said:

"Are you going to the village now upon my errand, Sandie?"

"Yes, lady, I was about going; an' I'd have gone sooner, only Mr. Tilton kept me a season making inquiries about the last night's burning."

"There will be no risk to yourself in going to the village?"

"I trust not, lady; any way, not more to-day than at some future time, an' I may as well have done with it."

"I would not have you go if I thought you ran any danger."

"I think I can run clear of it, lady, if I meet any." And Sandie turned to go, when Gertie called to him, and said:

"Would it not be better for you to wait until the return of Mr. Loder?"

Sandie's face flushed beneath the dust and grime upon it, as he replied:

"Thank ye, miss, but I can be circumspect, an' I think I have little to fear; last night's violence has appeased the anger of my mates for the present, an' I don't think I really run any risk."

"Well, if you are really going to the village, you can perform a little commission for me."

"An' I'd be honored, miss, if you would use my service."

"Wait a moment, and I will prepare a package which I wish left at Widow Prahm's house."

Gertie entered the house, but came out again in a few minutes, and handing Sandie a package, told him what she wished him to do with it, when the latter turned about and took his way to the village, little dreaming into what a desperate strait this little errand for Gertie was destined to lead him—a peril greater than any he had yet encountered.

CHAPTER X.

"THAT Sandie bears a charmed life, mates." Thus spoke Thumping Brad, to a knot of his companions who were gathered about him on the stoop of the village store.

"Ay, that he does, or else some other innocent chap has suffered in his stead; an' it was not he at all that you thumped upon the head."

"An' it must have been he, for did not I myself watch him leaving in the buggy to carry a message over to town?"

"An' if thou'rt of that opinion, it will stand us in hand not to trouble the chap further; there's a mystery about the man at best, lads."

"An' would ye let the death of Mills, our mate, go unavenged?"

"No, not I," spoke one of the men.

"Nor I," said another.

"Nor I! Nor I!" came successively from the balance. "If we believed that it was he who fired the fatal shot."

"You know it was he," said Brad.

"Then we will send word to the brotherhood's chief, and let him send one of the Secret Band; it's not necessary that any of our mates should run the risk of a halter for such as he!"

During the foregoing conversation, Sandie Carmichael had entered a miner's house near by, and was just coming thence again, when Thumping Brad exclaimed:

"I say, mates, barring the shooting of Mills, the chap there deserves a ducking in the stream beyond, for turning informer against his comrades! What say ye, men? 'twill not hurt him bodily, but will learn him better tricks next time."

The men seemingly acquiesced in Brad's proposition, when the latter, as Sandie approached, sung out:

"A word with thee, friend Carmichael, av ye please?"

Sandie stopped short; a red tinge dyed both cheeks, and an angry light shone in his eyes, as he replied:

"I want not to hold any parley with thee, Brad; thou'rt my sworn enemy by thine own admission."

"Not I more than the rest of thy mates, man; thou'rt a sneak and a coward; and what is worse, an informer against thy comrades." And as Brad spoke, he advanced toward Sandie threateningly, adding: "Thou'st earned a ducking, man, an' we'll give it thee."

Sandie drew slowly backward as Brad advanced, and said:

"If my mates have aught against me, I'll render them such satisfaction as they wish, but with thee I'll have nothing to do."

"Ay, but thou whelp, I'll have to do with thee; no doubt, with thy glib tongue, coward as thou art, thou mightst beg off from thy deserts;" and Brad raised a buckthorn stick which he carried in his hand, as though about to strike.

"Thou liest, Thumping Brad!" exclaimed Sandie, hotly, "when thou callest me a coward; an' if thou darest to strike me with your stick, I'll put the daylight through thee."

"Ay, mates, how is this? Who was the cur that shot our comrade, Mills, if not this whelp, who falls back so quickly upon his pistol?"

"Hold on, mates, an' allow me to say one word," said Sandie, as the riotous miners, urged by their leader, advanced toward him.

"Nay, not a word, thou coward," cried Brad, "thou canst not sneak out of this scrape as thou didst from the shaft yesternight."

"I do not wish to sneak out of anything, nor do I fear you; I wish only to tell the truth, and then I will take the consequences for anything I have said or done."

"Let the man speak," said one of the miners: "it's nothing but fair to hear what he has to say."

"Ay, let him speak," cried another, "though, curse me, if I think he can explain going against the men."

"Mates," he said, "I am not against you. I sympathize in all that you have demanded. I know that men in some of the mines are getting that which ye would ask, and in asking an increase ye are right; but as men, I'd like to ask ye if it is right to burn down a house over the heads of two innocent women? Is it right to resort to bloodshed? Two wrongs don't make a right, and ye wrong yourselves more than ye are wronged, when ye do anything unbecoming brave men. I am not an informer, and I believe myself the best friend of my mates, when I try to keep them from acts of violence and the counsels of those who would urge them against their best interests."

"An' ye mean the last slur for me?" growled Brad.

"I mean it for whoever the shoe fits."

"An' I'll crush thy skull in for thee, thou

lying informer!" cried Brad, again raising his stick and advancing threateningly.

Sandie's words had been well received by a majority of the miners, and when Brad started forward as though to strike him, several of them interfered, and their good-will toward Sandie was increased by the bold, unflinching attitude which he assumed.

"I am, an' wish to be, your friend, mates; an' ye will find me on your side against the bosses as long as ye avoid unnecessary violence an' bloodshed."

"But who shot Mills? Who shed the first blood?" cried Brad, tauntingly.

"Not I," replied Sandie, as the countenances of the men again began to glower.

"An' if not thou, man, who, then, was it that shot down our mate in cold blood?"

"Not me, I tell thee, Brad."

"Who, then? Come, an' if thou art not the murderer, informing is a trade in which thou art well versed. Tell us who it was that shot down our mate."

"I can not tell that, an' it would do no good if I did."

"An' dost thou know?" inquired one of the other miners.

"Yes, I do know who fired the shot; and if I had had my will, Mills would be alive and hearty at this moment," replied Sandie.

"An' if thou didst not fire upon us, thou canst tell who did. Come, speak up, man, an' it will relieve one half the spite we bear thee."

"No, I can not tell."

"Say, man, rather, that thou wilt not tell."

"So I say—I will not tell!"

"Then thou'rt no friend of thy mates."

"No, not he!" shouted Brad. "An' I'll wring the truth from thee, or squeeze thy wind-pipe till thou canst not speak!"

"Put down thy stick, Thumping Brad, an' I'll cast away my pistol," said Sandie; "then I'll dare thee to make good thy boastful words—otherwise, as I told thee, man, I'll send daylight through thee!"

Not all of the men present were particular friends of Brad; and some of them held a memory of old grievances against him; and this bold challenge of Sandie's was received with a slight murmur of approval, while one of the men exclaimed:

"That's fair, Brad; lay down the stick, an' thou'rt no match for the man; it's not for want of bigness; thou'lt make two of him upon the scales."

"Throw down your stick, Brad," cried several of the miners, anxious to see a fight, "it's not fair nor square to go at the man in that style."

"Ay, but it's my way of going at informers; neither fair nor square play shall a murderer and informer get from me," said Brad, as he sprung with uplifted stick at Sandie.

In the meantime Sandie stood his ground in such a position that he could spring to one side, but not evincing the least inclination to avoid the pending unequal contest; on the contrary, there was a savage gleam in his eye, and a watchful wariness in every movement, which suggested that he was likely to prove a dangerous antagonist, in spite of the odds against him.

CHAPTER XI.

Brad brought down his stick again, but Sandie kept beyond reach of it, until finally losing all patience, he watched his opportunity, dodged in between one of the intended strokes, and seizing Brad dexterously, raised him off from his feet, and threw him with a heavy thud prone upon the ground.

A slight murmur of approval greeted this bold maneuver, and a smile of derision rippling over the countenances of his companions was the first thing Brad observed as he rose to his feet, fairly foaming with rage.

"By heavens, man!" he hissed; "it's your life or mine now!" and drawing a huge sheath-knife from his pocket, he sprung at Sandie with a demoniac yell.

"Come on, coward and murderer!" exclaimed Sandie, as he caught up the stick which Brad had dropped. "I am a match for thee, even now."

"Put down your knife, Brad," called several of the miners. "Settle it between ye with a fair stand-up fight!"

"Ye be curs, an' on the side of an informer, and the slayer of our mate!" called Brad, as he made lunge after lunge at Sandie, with his formidable-looking knife; but the latter moved around with the lightness and agility of a cat,

while at the same time, he skillfully parried every wicked lunge that was made at him.

Thus, for a few moments, this desperate duel continued, when suddenly several of Brad's more intimate cronies came rushing upon the scene. The latter, by some means, had evidently been drinking, and recognizing only that a fight was going on between their comrade and the man whom they supposed to be an informer and their arch-enemy, and too inflamed by liquor to reason, or consider either right or wrong, they urged the fight on.

"Kill him, Brad!" shouted one. "Kill the informer, 'tis no more than right, an' it was he that killed our mate!"

"Stand back! give me a fair show for my life!" called Sandie, as Brad's friends crowded around closely, and impeded his movements.

"'Twas little show ye gave our mate, thou perjured villain and informer!" replied one of the men, and he shoved forward his foot, intending to trip the brave man who had only called for fair play.

"An' if ye are men and Britons," shouted Sandie, "ye'll not come a score against one. I can not battle with ye all at once! Give me a show for my life, an' I fighting against the odds!"

"Thou'rt not entitled to a show, thou son of a mean whelp! an' thou canst take that with a curse, thou rascal!" and as the miner spoke he dealt Sandie a powerful blow behind the ear.

"Hold on, man! none o' that!" cried one of those who had heard Sandie's explanation. "An' if thou'rt set to take a hand in," he continued, "ye may count me in also. I'll ne'er stand by and see two against one!"

In springing back from one of his opponent's terrible lunges, Sandie tripped upon a loose stone, and fell, when, with a wild yell, Brad sprung upon him, the threatening knife was uplifted in a moment, and it would have sundered poor Sandie's heart in twain, when suddenly all were startled by a wild, shrill whoop, and the next instant Indian Joe, appearing like one suddenly risen from the ground, leaped upon Brad, and with an exhibition of muscular power which was truly wonderful, raised the gigantic fellow off Sandie, and threw him with tremendous force tumbling and rolling some distance away; then, with gleaming eyes and swelling bosom, the old chief turned, and facing the group of astonished miners, exclaimed: "Ugh! Come! Old chief on the war-path! Old chief will fight! Let the white men come!"

In the meantime Sandie had regained his feet, and touching Joe upon the shoulder, he said:

"Thank you, Joe—you have saved my life; but don't challenge these men—some of them are my friends."

"No; Injun Sandie's friend," replied old Joe. "No friend stand and see other friend murdered."

Brad now approached, raging and limping, and calling to his companions, he said:

"Come, lads, are we to be baffled by this vagabond Indian?"

"Injun no vagabond," replied old Joe.

"Thumping Brad is a vagabond and a coward. Injun will fight him!"

Brad was about to speak further, when he was interrupted by one of the miners, who said:

"Thumping Brad, thou'rt always boasting of thy prowess. Why canst thou agree to fight Sandie a fair stand-up fight like a man, and not go seeking his life with clubs and knives?"

"Ay," called out others, "that's the talk, Brad; an' if thou tryest another game o' the kind thou has just played, there are others o' us will take a hand in."

The well-disposed miners were in the majority against Brad, and his friends, seeing the turn matters were taking, joined in and claimed that there should be a fair, stand-up fight.

"An' he'll not fight," said Brad, sullenly.

"He hath more tricks in him than a juggler."

"Ay, but I will fight thee fairly and squarely, Brad. An' may the best man win, an' let the issue settle matters between us until we have fresh cause for a quarrel."

"Would ye have me stand to a square fight with an informer?"

"I'll put it to the test in a fair fight, an' thou art a liar!" exclaimed Sandie.

"Ay, man, an' ye can do no more; and if Brad does not accept your challenge, we must say it's because o' fear o' thee."

"Thumping Brad is no cur, nor born of a whelp, like yon braggart!" exclaimed the giant, fiercely; "an' if it's the will o' my mates that

I chastise this informer, Brad's the man to do it!"

"Thou'rt talking now; an' when shall this matter come off, comrades?"

"When it suits the two men who are craving to exchange blows, it will suit the rest o' us."

"To-night!" said Brad.

"The time suits me," replied Sandie.

"An' where shall we meet?"

"Wherever it suits thee best, man."

"Twill be a moon-to-night at the full near midnight; at twelve I'll meet thee at the old dead shaft."

"I'll be there."

"See that thou dost!"

"If I fail thee, man, I'm the informer thou wouldst make our mates believe."

"Thou canst talk well!"

"Ay, man; an' if thine own heart does not fail thee, e'er midnight thou'lt find I can strike well, too."

"Then save thy words until thou'rt ready to give the blows."

"I'll bide thy advice, man, an' good-day to thee until we meet at the shaft."

"Thou'lt have a hard tussle with that chap, Brad," said one of the men, as Sandie moved away, accompanied by Indian Joe.

"Not I," answered Brad; "he'll ne'er be there."

"I do doubt thee, man; that man's no coward, an' I'm sorry that a suspicion rests on his loyalty to his mates; leastwise he'd be a comrade to be proud of."

"He's no comrade at all, man; he's a hired spy; some dapper clerk brought from the city, whose only recommendation is his sharp ears and his sneaking ways; he is a hired informer, mates, an' I'll prove it to ye yet."

CHAPTER XII.

"SANDIE'S a fool! Miners murder him to-night!"

Thus spoke old Indian Joe, as he and Sandie sat upon the chopping-block in the rear of Ralston's residence.

"No, Joe, you are mistaken. I will have as many friends there to-night as Brad will have."

"Injun no think so. Brad is a wild cat—a snake! Ugh! he never do anything good; he's a scamp!"

"You are right, Joe, he is a scamp; and he's worse. I believe that man already has the guilt of many a foul crime upon his soul; still I shall meet him, and if I lose my life, it will be as well lost thus as any other way."

As Sandie gave utterance to the last remark, he cast his eyes upon the ground, and there was a sad pathos in his tones, and a mournful expression upon his face, which now, having cleansed off the smut and grime which usually marred it, disclosed features of rarest manly beauty and refinement.

"Sandie must not throw away his life on a wolf!" said old Joe, after a few moments' pause.

"No, Joe; I do not believe a man is ever justified in throwing his life away; neither is he justified in trying to preserve it by shrinking from duty. If I lose my life at the deserted shaft to-night, it will be in as good a cause as it could be sacrificed."

While Sandie was speaking, and still gazing upon the ground, a shadow was thrown across his vision, and upon raising his eyes, he saw Gertie Loder standing directly in front of him. There was a look of intense sadness upon her features, which was instantly chased away and followed by one of unfeigned surprise, as her eyes fell upon Sandie's upturned face; and as the latter met her surprised and earnest gaze, a blush as deep as a maiden's suffused his countenance.

"What fresh danger are you about to encounter?" said Gertie.

"Who spoke of danger, lady?"

"I did; I asked you what fresh danger you were about to incur for those who have no claim upon you. I fear the little commission you performed for me to-day has led you into some new difficulty; if so, I am to blame, and must share my proportion of the consequences," Gertie continued, noticing that her question seemed to trouble Sandie.

"Lady, there are no consequences to share. I am in no danger more than any man in my position in life is called upon to encounter almost daily. Thumping Brad has always been unfriendly toward me; and to-day I met him, and he sought to quarrel with me; but he is a

coward, and a man who talks loudly, and, therefore, is not to be feared."

"He has proven himself to be a dangerous man," said Gertie, "and he intends to do you some harm."

"I think I am able to encounter all the harm that braggart can do me."

"If I had not sent you out of your way to execute my errand, you would not have met this man."

"Lady, I would have met him sooner or later, and it is as well that I met him at once. I am a workman, and can not be driven from earning my daily bread."

"Promise me that you will avoid meeting this man as far as you can."

"Lady, I thank you for your concern on my account, but I am not worthy that you interest yourself in my affairs. I can make no promises."

"Very well; I am disappointed, but I will not urge you to do as I wish. I can at least warn you to be upon your guard; and I would also advise you to avoid meeting this Brad, if possible, until after the return of Mr. Loder."

As Gertie ceased speaking, she turned about and walked hastily away. The moment she had gone, Sandie regretted his abruptness and positive rudeness. Walking away from where old Joe, the Indian, was standing, Sandie clasped his hands together, and raising his handsome face heavenward, he exclaimed, while a convulsion of agony swept over his features:

"Oh, Lord, how long must this last? Will this cloud never be lifted? or must I always lead the life that I am now living? If so, better that I should die before my suffering was sufficiently great and it hath increased a thousand-fold. I am surrounded by mystery, and yet, at times, I doubt me whether I have done rightly. I sought this life because there was danger attached to it. I would not go as a soldier—no, oh, no; and yet, my God! what a fearful alternative it has been. I—ay, I—a miner, begrimed and hard worked, uncouth and rough, and now—oh, God! I am about to engage in a personal hand-to-hand fisticuff conflict with a great, ignorant boor! How long must this last? Would that his first blow would prove fatal. Why did I defend my miserable life to-day? It had been better if I had let him slay me, and then the agony, the doubt, the mental misery, would have been passed; death would even now be a boon—yea, for I fear this later emotion comes fraught with fresh bitterness!"

"Injun will meet Sandie when the moon rises above Blue Ridge," said old Joe, suddenly advancing and touching the latter lightly upon the shoulder.

"All right, Joe; I will be there."

"Sandie must have no fear," said Joe, observing the former's pale and excited features.

"I am not of the fearing kind, Joe."

"Ugh! Injun thought so! Thumping Brad great coward! great rascal! Injun kill him soon, waugh!" and before Sandie was aware of his intention, the old chief bounded away.

Some five hours later, Sandie passed down the road toward the rendezvous where he was to meet the old chief. He found the latter awaiting him, and together they stole stealthily through the hamlet, and took the road leading toward the deserted shaft. Not a word was exchanged between them, but warily they stole along.

It was a lovely night; the air was mild and pleasant, and the moon illuminated hill and plain with its silver radiance. After three quarters of an hour's brisk walking, they came in sight of the place where the old shaft had been sunk; and as they approached nearer, they recognized, in the moonlight, the forms of at least two score of the miners, who were gathered in knots, or were walking restlessly about, like so many weird spirits.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was evident as the men who had volunteered to act as seconds in the fistic duel went about the preparations, that they fully understood their business. A rope had been brought with them, and they speedily began driving stakes in the ground, proving that the coming combat was to be conducted in all respects after the code established by what is termed the twenty-four foot ring.

Both of the principals had their sympathizers, and each was surrounded by them as they set about their preparations.

At length it was announced that everything was ready. Brad was the first to step forward, shy his hat into the ring, after the manner of professional pugilists, and an instant later follow it. He was stripped, according to the mode, to his waist, and as the moonlight fell upon his powerful bust and disclosed its powerful contour, and the remarkable display of muscle which he possessed, a murmur of admiration burst from the assembled miners.

A few moments after, Sandie shied his hat into the ring, and, like Brad, quickly followed it; and the two combatants stood before the assembled miners in a fine position for comparative criticism. Brad was by far the larger, and made a more formidable display of muscle; and yet there were those present who did not falter to say:

"Brad will not have the easy time that he reckons on."

Sandie, though much smaller in stature, was more compactly built, though he had not such great bunches of muscle as laid upon Brad's arms.

"Dang it, man!" exclaimed one of the miners; "that chap Carmichael strips more like a young lord who had naught else to do but go fox-hunting, and rowing, and the like, instead of work in a coal breast!"

"Ay, thou'rt right, man! an' there's something mysterious about the chap anyhow; I always noted that, an' if I was betting money, it's he that I would risk it on!"

The preliminaries having all been settled, and the rules which were to govern the fight thoroughly explained, they were told to advance to the scratch.

"Time!" called the umpire; and in the clear moonlight the two men advanced to the center of the ring, with arms extended in regular pugilistic attitude. It was like a second David facing a modern Goliath.

The interest in the combat on the part of the lookers-on became intense; they watched with bated breath each movement of the two antagonists. Again and again Brad struck out, but each time his more agile opponent avoided his blows.

"He's a game 'un, and as supple as a cat," remarked one.

"Close wi' him, man!" whispered Brad's second, "or the chap will outgeneral ye!"

Thus advised, Brad advanced, and attempted to seize Sandie in his powerful grasp. His intention to accomplish this latter maneuver made him less guarded; when suddenly a dull thud was heard, and Brad lay in a heap in his corner. Sandie had watched his opportunity, and had dealt him a powerful blow which knocked his gigantic enemy clean off his feet.

After a few moments' rest, a second time the umpire called "time," and again the two men advanced to the center of the ring.

"Mind thyself this time, Brad," cautioned his second. "A few more thumps and falls like that, man, an' thou'rt gone."

"Thou'rt wrong, man; it hath but set my blood in circulation. Come on now, Sandie Carmichael, an' I'll give thee a taste o' the grass, thou whelp!"

A fearful struggle now ensued. Back and forth across the roped arena, without any regard for the code of rules adopted, they struggled. A torrent of oaths continually poured from Brad's mouth, as he fairly foamed with rage; and finally, as every movement and feint was defeated, in sheer rage and madness he buried his teeth in Sandie's shoulder. By the dim light of the moon, which was now partially shrouded behind fleecy clouds, this brutal act was unobserved, and Sandie, though stung by the sharp pain, would not himself proclaim it, but manfully continued the struggle without giving utterance to a word. But the very horror of the thought that he was being literally chawed by his antagonist, somewhat unnerved him; and besides, the desperate exertion which he had made against the odds which opposed him began to tell upon his strength; Brad's fury and rage added to his mad power, and at length Sandie was compelled to succumb, and fell, dragging Brad down with him, when the latter commenced dealing him a series of tremendous blows while prone upon the ground. This unfairness struck the miners with horror, and a shout of protest went up from them, while Sandie's seconds rushed forward and tried to drag the monster from off their champion.

When Sandie was raised from the ground, and led over to his corner, his seconds at once discovered that he had been bitten.

"Why, blast it, man," exclaimed one of them,

"the villain hath bitten thee, an' I'll call a foul on him."

"We are not battling for a wager," said Sandie, quietly.

"Thou'rt right, my lad; but he shalt not abuse thee that way, an' I standing to sponge thee."

And in a loud voice the man proclaimed Brad's meanness and brutality. A murmur of indignation greeted his statement, and even Brad's own friends protested against anything as mean as this.

"Ye must not disgrace thyself in that way again, Brad," said one of them, "or I'll against thee. Thou hast a square antagonist, an' the least thou can do is fight him squarely."

Again they came to the scratch. This time, even in the dim light, those that stood nearest to Sandie recognized a fierce, meaning gleam in the glance of his eye; and the moment the combat was renewed, they discovered also that he had changed his tactics entirely, and, in the parlance of the ring, "meant business." Instead of waiting to repel Brad's attacks, he himself forced the fighting; and blow after blow resounded upon the former's hardened face, and the blood began to flow in torrents. The battle now waxed fierce and terrible. Fearful blows were given and taken; but throughout, the advantage appeared to remain with Sandie, who finally succeeded a second time in sending Brad to grass.

When the giant came to the scratch, after the last fall, it became evident that he was beginning to weaken, and the battle became almost entirely one-sided; and at length, when Sandie again succeeded in knocking his antagonist down, the latter failed to rise again.

"Aha!" shouted Sandie's friends, "the big un is gone!" and they commenced closing in upon the ring, when suddenly all were startled by a wild shriek of terror, whose shrillness proclaimed its issuance from the throat of a woman, and the very next instant a figure clad in white came rushing in among them.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SCENE of confusion at once ensued upon the sudden appearance of this strange, phantom-like figure which glided in among the rough men like a spirit from another world. For an instant all seemed stricken with awe, when the woman spoke:

"Have you killed him?" she exclaimed, excitedly.

"Killed who, my lady?"

"Sandie Carmichael."

"No, miss; an' it's a question if he has not killed the big un."

"Who is the big one? What do you mean?"

"Faith," cried one of the men, recognizing their interrogator, "it's Miss Gertie Loder, the manager's niece!"

"Yes, I am Miss Loder," said Gertie, "and I would be thankful if you would explain the meaning of this scene."

"Blast me, miss, but it seems queer to see you at such a place as this. Faith, my lady, there's nothing of much matter going on, only a couple o' the lads have had a little set-to, an' the smaller man has got the better o' the larger one."

At this moment Sandie, who had resumed his apparel, stepped forward, and addressing Gertie, said:

"My dear young lady, what under heavens brought you here in such a desolate place and at such an hour?"

"I came to save you from being murdered, Mr. Carmichael. You have placed our family under heavy obligations, and I had reason to believe that by so doing you had incurred the enmity of those who would do you injury."

"I am certainly grateful, my lady, for your interest in my fate; but I fear that you have run a greater risk to serve me than I deserve. Come, Miss Loder," he continued, "I will accompany you back to the village; it was very rash of you to venture out!" and with a gallantry which was remarkable under the circumstances, he advanced and offered his arm to lead Gertie away.

In the meantime, Brad had come to himself, and smarting and raging under the mortification of his defeat, had overheard all that had passed, and as Sandie and Gertie started to move away, he exclaimed:

"Don't let him go away, lads; ye'll have no better opportunity to punish the whelp."

"Ay, man, but I'm not certain but thou'rt right."

Sandie had gone some distance with Gertie, and had just respectfully requested her to hasten, when one of the men called after him:

"I say, lad, the lady will get along well enough the same way she came; come you back, as we'd have a few words wi' thee!"

"Don't go back, they mean to do you harm," said Gertie.

"I'll not go back, miss, an' I can help it; but the feelings of the men are much riled against me."

Indian Joe, who had been a silent witness of the combat, and who had lingered behind when Sandie left with Gertie, now came gliding after them; and as he drew near, said:

"Sandie must not go back; white lady has made trouble; miners mean harm."

"Have I made trouble!" exclaimed Gertie. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she continued, "I hope not; I only came prompted by my anxiety."

"You have acted nobly, Miss Loder, and you have not made matters any worse, I may hope; the men are much angered against me, and are determined to wreak their vengeance upon me; at any rate, your coming has really been a service in furnishing me an excuse for coming away."

The miners, seeing that Sandie paid no attention to their summons, several of them started toward him, again hailing him.

Sandie turned, and stopping an instant, said: "Mates, I will converse with thee in the morning; at present, I must attend to the safety of Miss Loder."

Just at this moment a clatter of horses' feet was heard upon the hard road a few rods distant, and a moment later a cavalcade of horsemen appeared.

Seeing the miners, the horsemen at once came to a halt, and after a few moments' conversation, they turned in from the road, and drove straight toward them.

"What is the meaning of this, lads?" said one of the men.

"Blast me if I know!" answered another, "unless it is a posse from the town, with the county sheriff and the manager, Mr. Loder, at their head!"

"Dang it, man, but I believe thou'rt right!" as the latter spoke, he turned and fled like a deer, followed by several of his companions. Upon seeing the movement, the horsemen dashed ahead in pursuit, and their leader exclaimed:

"Stay, in the name of the law! or we will fire upon you!"

As the horsemen were close upon them, a number of the miners stopped, while the balance continued their flight. Among the latter was Thumping Brad. One of the riders seemed to single him out especially, and riding by several others, he dashed straight after Sandie's late antagonist. Coming pretty close, he called out:

"Hold, Brad, or I'll shoot you down like a dog!"

The voice was that of Mr. Loder, the manager. Brad recognized his pursuer at once, and redoubled his efforts to escape.

"Once I warn you, Thumping Brad, another second and I fire if you don't surrender."

Coming to a halt, Brad turned suddenly, and facing the manager, who held his horse back aloft upon his haunches, the miner exclaimed:

"Blast thee! why am I thus hunted like a dog?"

"I will tell you at some future time, you scoundrel! for the present you are my prisoner; and if you do not wish to be shot down, you will follow me quietly." And as Mr. Loder spoke, he aimed a cocked pistol at Brad's head. The latter well knew the determined character of the manager, and also that the chances were against him, if he attempted to escape, and he said, in a low, sullen voice:

"Thou'rt wrong in chasing me like a criminal; but mark me, rich and powerful as thou'rt, I'll make thee rue this night's work."

"And I will make you rue last night's work, you villain!" said Mr. Loder, fiercely. "Come along, and if you make the least movement to escape, you die; so mark me well, fellow!"

"I have naught to do but bide thy warning at present," replied Brad, as he slowly followed the manager back toward the place where the balance of the horsemen were assembled, with several others of the men as prisoners. As Mr. Loder approached, he said:

"There, sheriff, look out for this scoundrel; he is the fellow Brad, the ringleader and instigator of all of the mischief."

"Aha! Mr. Brad," said the sheriff, "I think

you and I have met before; come here, my man, I have a pair of ornaments for you."

"Ye have no need to put the handcuffs upon me," said Brad; "I will go along quietly enough; I have done nothing that I should wish to run away."

"I wouldn't trust you, fellow!" and as he spoke, he dismounted, and approaching Brad, clapped the nippers upon his wrists.

Mr. Loder now, for the first time, recognized the presence of his niece, and with a cry of surprise, he exclaimed:

"Why, Gertie, child, how under heaven is it that I find you here?"

Gertie gave a hurried explanation of the cause of her presence, when Mr. Loder dismounted, and advancing toward Sandie, said:

"You are a noble fellow! you shall never regret your faithfulness during the last few days. I shall make it my business to look after your interests with the company."

Upon hearing Sandie thus addressed by the manager, the balance of the men, who had been captured and were handcuffed, began to curse and jeer at him.

"See, lads," exclaimed one, "how proud the informer is at the praise he gets!"

"Ay," said another; "an' we'll have him for the inside boss after this, as a reward for his treachery to his mates."

"He is a marked man after this, mates, to the brotherhood!" said another.

During these jibes and sneers of his former companions, Sandie stood with his head hanging down, as though completely overcome with shame and mortification.

"Ay, well he may hang his head," called the men; and another, calling Sandie by name, said:

"Don't thou feel uneasy about the neck, man? If thou dost not, it's because thou'rt not in danger of dangling from the limb of a tree, thou foul whelp of a traitor!"

"Come, men," called out the sheriff; "we will away to the town, and turn the key upon these murderers and house-burners, and to-morrow we will come for the rest of them."

"How did you come here, Gertie?" said Mr. Loder, as the sheriff and his posse rode away with their prisoners.

"I walked every step of the way."

"Well, my child, this is the most extraordinary adventure I ever knew a young lady to be a party to; but as it is, you must mount my horse, and we will return to the village;" and, accompanied by Sandie and Indian Joe, Mr. Loder started upon his return toward the mine.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. LODER had returned early in the evening, upon the same night when Sandie fought his unequal fight with Thumping Brad, and learning the full particulars of the riot and destruction of his property, had at once dispatched Mr. Tilton after the sheriff; and a warrant having been speedily procured, they had descended upon the men as related in the last chapter, and had arrested as many of the prime movers in the disturbances as possible.

A week later, the examination of the miners came off. Mr. Loder was a firm, uncompromising man; he was an old manager, had had frequent experiences with miners under various circumstances, and it was a principle with him never to yield one jot nor tittle.

Ralston was unable to be present at the trial; owing to the injuries which he had received; and Sandie was relied upon as the main witness to identify the active participants in the riot.

What more greatly incensed Mr. Loder was the fact that the policy of insurance on his property had expired, and owing to this fatal oversight its destruction proved a total loss.

Brad was the first prisoner summoned to plead. The miners had secured counsel, and the latter had demanded a separate trial or examination for each of his clients. When Brad arose in obedience to the request of the clerk of the court, a murmur of sympathy pervaded the court. At length the direct examination of the principal witness began.

Sandie appeared calm and resolute; there was an unnatural brilliancy in his eyes, and his face was pale, otherwise he seemed perfectly composed and determined.

The disinterested spectators were all struck with amazement, upon beholding the handsome, intelligent face of the witness. There was a striking contrast between his appearance and that of his fellow-workmen, and it seemed hard

to believe that this man, with such a fine, handsome face, could really be a miner; and yet he appeared in miner's garb; and in answer to the questions of the prosecuting officer, answered in the idiom peculiar to a certain class of his *confrères*.

"What is your name?" inquired the county attorney.

"Sandie Carmichael."

"What is your occupation?"

"I am a miner."

"Were you present when the house of Mr. Loder was fired by the prisoner at the bar, and his companions?"

"I was."

"Please state the occurrences of that night, and make plain, to the best of your ability, the prisoner's connection with that affair."

"He was present, and urged the men to burn the house."

"You saw him and thoroughly identify him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see him with a lighted brand in his hand?"

"Yes, sir."

Other witnesses were called; their testimony was only corroborative of Sandie's; and at the conclusion the case looked very bad for the defendant.

The latter's counsel, in his summing up, tried hard to cast discredit upon Sandie's testimony.

Brad was found guilty, and remanded for sentence.

The trial continued for several days. One after another of the men arraigned were called to plead, but, strangely enough, Sandie had become suddenly very forgetful, not a fact could he remember, implicating either of the other prisoners.

"The witness has been tampered with," said the prosecuting attorney.

"He has been intimidated," explained Mr. Loder.

At the final conclusion of the trial, Sandie left the court-house a disgraced man. He had not won the respect of the court officers, neither had he softened the bitterness of the miners' feelings toward him.

The one believed him either bribed or intimidated, while his comrades thought that he had been controlled by personal spite toward Brad, and had only failed to testify against the balance of his mates through fear, hoping that after having vented his vengeance upon Brad, he might obtain the good will of his fellow-workmen by refusing to criminate them.

As he was about leaving the court-house, Mr. Loder came toward him, and said:

"I am under obligations to you, Sandie, although I believe that you could have made my debt of gratitude heavier if you had exhibited more nerve, and have told the truth boldly about the rest of the prisoners. You need not have feared, as I would have protected you."

"Thank you, Mr. Loder," replied Sandie, with a proud straightening up of his form, "but you mistake my motives entirely; fear is a sentiment that I do not recognize."

"Then why did not you testify truthfully against the balance of the ruffians who burned my property?"

"If I did not testify truthfully, sir, I perjured myself; I would not tell a lie to save my life, much less swear to one!"

"Then why didn't you testify?"

"Because I do not believe in my own heart that the men were guilty. Brad was, according to my belief, the sole instigator of the riot, and alone responsible; he is convicted, and this ought to be satisfactory; you will have less cause to apprehend another riot now that he is gone."

At this instant a great noise was heard without the court house. Yells and oaths were mingled with the screams of women and children, and suddenly above all arose a wild, fierce whoop.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Sandie, as he rushed out of the door, "they're murdering poor Indian Joe! That was a whoop of rage and defiance. He is my only friend, and must not be murdered because he is such!" and Sandie rushed forth, with a savage gleam in his eye.

CHAPTER XVI

A FEARFUL and desperate fight seemed imminent. The balance of the miners were fast gathering, and in a few seconds both Sandie and the Indian would have been beaten to death, when the sheriff appeared upon the scene, accompanied by several constables, and by his boldness and decision, quickly dispersed the rioters.

As the angry men were driven away, Mr. Loder again joined Sandie, and said:

"My man, it is not safe for you to return to the mine at present, and you had better remain in town a few days at my expense, until matters are somewhat quieted down; then I wish you to return, as I can not afford to lose so valuable a man as you if I can help it."

A week passed. During this time Sandie remained secluded in the town. Indian Joe had disappeared immediately after his rescue by the sheriff from the enraged miners. Sandie had been anxious to see him, and had daily wandered through the town, expecting the old chief to turn up; but the Indian came not. Once, during the week, Mr. Loder had had an interview with our hero, and had insisted that he should remain, and eventually resume his position in the mines, but Sandie had shaken his head negatively, and protested that he would never take shovel or pick again.

"Then you can command my services in any manner that you choose; you have been of great service to me, and I wish to serve you," said Mr. Loder.

"I am very thankful, Mr. Loder," replied Sandie, with a confident shake of his head and a mysterious twinkle in his eyes; "but I am perfectly able to look out for myself."

"You are a brave young man, undoubtedly, and you are capable of something higher than the labor of a miner; still, you will find that in whatever walk of life you may choose, the assistance of a friend will prove advantageous to you."

"Mr. Loder, I rendered a service to you, as you honor me by calling it, only in my line of duty; I did not expect any reward, nor do I wish any."

"You are a strange man."

"Ay, Mr. Loder, a stranger man than you dream of."

"You have seen better days; I never noticed it before, but I am now convinced that you have a history."

"I have seen worse days, Mr. Loder, and I hope to see better, if it shall be so ordered by Providence."

"Well, man, I can not lose sight of you, and I must serve you in some way, as I have promised to."

"Who, sir, has taken sufficient interest in a poor miner like me to induce them to exact a promise in my behalf?"

"My niece, Miss Gertie Loder, is the person who exacted the promise from me."

Upon hearing this reply, Sandie started; a pallor overspread his face, and his lips trembled with excess of emotion, as he replied:

"I am amazed and gratified to learn that Miss Loder has evinced any interest in my affairs, but, Mr. Loder, you can not serve me; you are right—I have a history, and if I chose could command any influence in my behalf; but I neither need it nor wish it. Time is my best friend, that may do a good turn for me, or still permit me to wander the earth, a fugitive and a vagabond. But, Mr. Loder," and as Sandie spoke, a noble light shone in his eyes, although there was a sadness in the tones of his voice, as he added, "in that unknown world beyond the grave, where the vista of existence is limitless, there shall be a general averaging of the rights and wrongs of mortality; if I am not righted in this world, I certainly shall be in the next."

"He is a bold, honest man," muttered Mr. Loder, and one who has moved in different circles than the society of miners." After a moment's quiet meditation, he added, speaking audibly: "Yes—yes; after all, that is the only solution of the mystery; the man has committed some crime, or has been accused of its commission, and has sought to hide himself from the officers of the law in the mines. Well, well, I would not surrender him if I could help it, even if he were hiding in my very house; yet it is possible the man may be a villain, still he does not look nor act like one."

"Who is that you think may possibly be a villain?" exclaimed Mr. Loder's niece, Gertie, as she came out of the house and seated herself on the step of the piazza, near her uncle's feet.

"I was thinking of that young miner, who seems to have awakened so much interest in your thoughts."

"What leads you to think that it is possible that he may be a villain?"

"Simply because he is not what he seems and pretends to be."

"What does he pretend to be?"

"A miner."

"Well, is he not a miner?"

"He appears to have been for the last six months, Gertie; but that man, you may rest assured, has a history."

"I thought that from the first moment he came to warn aunt and I of the intentions of the men upon that fatal night."

"What first aroused your suspicions?"

"The fact that ordinarily he talked like a miner; but the moment he became earnest, he unconsciously spoke like a man who had associated with refined people; and furthermore, in spite of his rough garb, there was a grace to his movements far different from the usual slouching gait of a vulgar man."

"It is strange that you should have noticed all this so quickly, my dear."

"We ladies, uncle, are generally more observing as regards these minor points than men."

"Gertie," Mr. Loder said, abruptly, "it can't be possible that your heart has become interested in this young miner?"

"Why would you think such a fact possible?" Gertie asked.

"Well, I will say, my dear, that I should consider it very improbable; still, you appear to take an unseemly interest in championing this young fellow, and it struck me that, because there was a slight semblance of romance thrown about him, owing to the mystery which seems to surround him, that possibly you might have become more imaginative than prudent; you know, missy, that a dramatic and romantic halo usually pervades a mystery."

"Yes, uncle, I am aware of that; but it is not so in this case. I have not tried to imagine who or what this young miner may be—I only know that he has been brave and noble; and I admire bravery and nobility in any one."

"Admiration is only a precursor sometimes, Gertie, of a stronger sentiment."

"What stronger sentiment do you allude to?"

"Love."

"Well, uncle, if I fall in love with this miner, it will be no fault of mine; our affections go forth, and alight wheresoever they choose, whether we will or not," replied Gertie, boldly, and with a saucy smile.

"But the romance which surrounds this young man may possibly be suddenly exploded by the discovery that he is an escaped criminal, who is merely hiding in the mines, in the garb and character of a miner for the purpose of evading justice."

"I do not believe that Mr. Carmichael is a criminal!"

"Mr. Carmichael! You are enthusiastic!"

"Yes, sir."

"You astonish me; the idea that you should seriously think of a miner, under any circumstances! You forget that you are an heiress."

"No; I have not forgotten that fact, as I am constantly reminded of it."

"Well, Miss Gertie, I wish you to remember one thing: When you marry, I expect to see you united to a gentleman."

"When I marry, uncle, if it should ever be my fate to do so, I expect to marry a gentleman!"

"Then banish all thoughts of this miner, Sandie, from your heart."

"I am not aware yet that he has ever held a place in my heart," said Gertie, with a mischievous smile; "but there is one thing, uncle, I want you to remember, that when I do marry, the person I love must be a brave, noble, generous man; and when I find such, and my heart tells me that he is worthy of my love, I shall not stop to consider whether he is a prince or a miner—whether he is wealthy or poor; but he must be noble and brave and generous!" And with an independent step and a proud carriage of her head, Gertie turned and entered the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

"GREAT heavens! at last! at last! justice has asserted itself! Vengeance deep and bitter has recoiled upon itself! 'the mills of the gods grind slowly;' but injustice, wrong, and oppression have at length been crushed beneath their resistless wheels! Hope once again blooms fresh and strong in my heart! Heaven be praised!"

Thus spoke Sandie Carmichael as he stood alone in his lowly lodgings in the town where he had resided since the trial of Thumping Brad.

Daily since the miner's trial, he had called regularly at the post-office, and inquired for a letter. And at last his stereotyped inquiry: "Is there a letter for Sandie Brown?" had been answered in the affirmative by the clerk; and an instant later, with brightened eyes and a quickened step, Sandie, with the letter in his possession, had hastened home; and when we find him at the opening of the chapter, he is standing with the letter in his hand; and after having perused it over and over again, at length gives utterance to the words above quoted.

After a full half hour spent in silent communion with his own thoughts, Sandie again soliloquized audibly:

"During the last six months I would have received this letter as a message from Heaven, bidding me to step from darkness into light! After weary years of toil and misery, 'where a ray of sunshine never can be found'—ay, then I would have hastened away with lightning speed; and now I feel as though I could forever linger among these rugged hills. Ay, and rather than go away, I could almost promise to labor the balance of my days down in the depths of the earth, with the only hope of once in awhile having a momentary glance of that dear face. Yes, yes, Gertie Loder, I, Sandie, the coal miner, have dared to permit your sweet image to become imprinted upon my heart. What presumption! her aunt would cry, if she were aware of the hopes that even I dare indulge. And Mr. Loder, what contempt would agitate his stern face, if he dreamed of my audacity! And Gertie, what would she think? how would she receive a revelation of the truth?"

Again for a few moments he appeared lost in meditation, as he twirled the letter carelessly in his hand. Finally he clinched his hand with a fierce energy, and stamped his foot excitedly as he exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, by Heaven, she shall stand the test! I will not unfold the whole truth, but I will concoct a story which shall smooth over the present apparent distance between our conditions, and then I, who could dare to claim the hand of a princess, will lay all at the feet of this fair maid of the coal mine."

Late in the afternoon a plainly dressed but handsome man entered a livery stable and hired a saddle-horse.

"Who is that chap?" inquired the proprietor of the stables, as the man mounted and drove away. "I never saw him before."

"Nor I either; and I am kind of sorry that you let him have the nag."

"Oh, I guess he is all right; if any man ever had an honest face, that young man has; I would risk him for anything."

"Who are you speaking about?" said a youth who was lounging around the stables.

"We were talking about that young man who just rode away from here on horseback."

"Oh, I know him; he is the informer who was the chief witness against the men who burned down Loder's house up at the mine."

"You are wrong there, my lad, for I was present at the trial, and the chap that gave evidence against that man Thumping Brad was a different looking man entirely."

"I tell you I am right; he boards right opposite where I live, and he has got nice toggery on now, that is the reason you don't recognize him; but I know him well. My sister says he is the handsomest chap in town, and she would set her cap for him only for his being a miner."

"I guess your sister would not thank you, my boy, for telling what she says out of school."

"I don't care; I only told you that you might make sure that I knew who the man was. If I had a horse to hire, he would be the last man I would hire it to just about these times."

"Why?"

"Because the best thing that man can do is to slope; the miners have sworn to have his life, and you may bet that they will, unless he 'gits out and gits.'"

"He has had plenty of chances to leave if he was anxious to; and furthermore, if he is really the man you say that he is, lad, he is not the chap to leave for fear of anybody."

"But I heard him talking to Mr. Loder the other day, and he said he was going away."

"Well, I guess he will not go away on horseback; and if he does, he will not make far with the beast he is riding without leaving his trail behind, for that mare is known for a hundred miles around this country, and as my property, too."

In the meantime, Sandie Carmichael—for it

was he who had dressed himself up in a style to suit the plan he intended to carry out—had turned the horse's head toward the miners' hamlet.

It was between nine and ten o'clock when Sandie cantered through the village, and took the road leading toward the present abode of Mr. Loder.

"I am late," he muttered, "and it is possible that I may not have a chance to see Gertie to-night; if not, I will drive over to Radley's, and remain there until morning. And to-morrow I can watch my opportunity, and will catch her when alone. I know that I am doing an unusual thing; still, my whole life has been a series of contraries, and it will be but an added one if I fail in my present hopes."

In order to reach Mr. Loder's new residence, it was necessary for Sandie to pass over the same road and near the same ledge where he had had his desperate struggle with Thumping Brad some weeks previous, and beyond, even past, the mouth of the shaft and the engine-room building.

Without any notable incident, he proceeded along, glancing warily from side to side, prepared to guard himself from any sudden surprise, until he neared that part of the road which wound by the mouth of the shaft and engine-room, when he was suddenly startled by seeing the tall figure of a man rise out of the gully beside the road, pass through the shadow of the engine-room, and disappear upon the further side.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Sandie, tightly clinching his pistol, "if I didn't know that Thumping Brad was an inmate of a prison, securely locked in by bolt and key, I should say that that was his form that just crossed the road and disappeared behind the engine-house; but no! it can not possibly be him! and yet that individual, whoever he is, was aware of my approach, when he leaped out of the gully, and stole stealthily across the road!"

"I would like to have an inkling of that chap's intentions," said Sandie, as he brought his horse to a sudden halt, and leaned forward over the animal's neck, to see if he could observe any further movement on the part of the mysterious figure.

"That was the figure of a stranger in these immediate parts," continued Sandie, "for there is not a man within ten miles of here possessing such a large figure as that individual, whoever he may be, that just glided across my path beyond there."

For full five minutes the miner sat upon his horse, and thought over what it was best to do under the circumstances. To turn back would be ridiculous; to advance would be dangerous; for our hero felt satisfied in his own mind that the man, be he stranger or acquaintance, was lying in wait for him, and was, most likely, the cause of his horse's sudden terror a few moments previous. An instant's consideration confirmed the latter belief. "What would be easier than to rise up suddenly before the horse at that particular part of the road, and cause him to shy over the cliff." As Sandie thought of this, a cold shudder ran over his frame, and he thanked God, by an inward ejaculation, for his narrow escape from a terrible death. This latter conviction, also, confirmed his suspicions that the ruffian knew who he was, had been lying in wait for him, and had, with a low, ruffianly cunning, chosen that particular spot to murder him when it could with reasonable probability be made to appear that his death was the result of an accident.

"Forewarned forearmed," muttered Sandie, as he struck his horse's side gently with his heels upon either flanks, and urged him slowly forward, while in his hand he carried, ready for instant use, a cocked pistol.

Upon nearing the engine-room he again came to a halt, and sung out, in a clear, firm voice:

"Who is there?"

There was no response.

Again Sandie called out:

"If there is any one in hearing of my voice, if I do not receive an answer I will shoot down the first person I meet within a hundred yards at sight!"

Again there was no response.

"The responsibility of a death must rest with the person who refuses to answer." A third time called Sandie.

Still there was no reply.

Sandie at length was compelled to question whether he had not been deceived by his own imagination, and whether or not some passing shadow had not been mistaken by him for the

figure of a human being. But then, again, what had startled his horse so suspiciously at that dangerous part of the road, where such an accident, nine times out of ten, would have proven fatal. Still, again, there was no one, to his knowledge, beside Thumping Brad, who was so large of stature about the mines.

These thoughts followed one another through his mind, and only served to perplex him, when suddenly another suggestion presented itself, and he exclaimed excitedly:

"Great Heaven! why did I not think of it before. It may be a stranger, and still he may be lying in wait for me. It is—it must be a murderer by lot—a man appointed to murder me as an informer! A member of the secret brotherhood! Ay, the man's stature is accounted for—he is set upon my track—he must murder me, or break his oath, or die! Well, let him die, for I feel that my time has not come yet!" and Sandie struck his horse's flanks smartly, and dashed bravely ahead.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRIVING past the lane which branched off from the main road and ran by Mr. Loder's house, Sandie drove on some distance, and then coming to a halt, picketed his horse, and started across the lots toward the house.

Mr. Loder's new residence was a regular old-fashioned country farm-house, built after the Dutch style, painted red, and with a piazza raised only one step from the ground, traversing the whole length of the house both front and rear.

As Sandie approached, a sight met his gaze which for a moment caused his heart to stand still; then, with a wild exclamation, he clasped his hand to his brow, and reeled and staggered like a drunken man.

"My God! my God!" he exclaimed, "this ends it all! my hopes blighted and blasted in a moment! Oh, Gertie, Gertie!" he continued, "I had indulged a bright dream; but no, no! I am accursed; it is not for me to be happy on earth; as soon as the cup of happiness is raised to my lips, some specter hand dashes it at my feet, and a mist of gloom arises from the broken fragments."

The spectacle which had so suddenly changed Sandie's happy anticipations to dark foreboding clouds of misery, was the sudden beholding, as he approached Mr. Loder's house, of her whose image filled his heart leaning lovingly upon the arm of a handsome stranger.

The couple were out upon the balcony, and were standing directly before the low window, from out which flashed a clear, brilliant ray of light, thereby making plain and distinct every expression and emotional play upon both of their countenances.

Their attitude could not be mistaken; it was one of mutual confidence and love.

As our readers will yet learn, Sandie Carmichael was a far different person from what his adventures thus far would indicate; he was of a strong, intense nature—a man who in battle was a lion, and in love a lamb; in strife, his nerves were like steel; in the presence of the object of his affections, like worsted.

When Sandie first cast his eyes upon Gertie Loder, as he saw her sitting upon the piazza of Mr. Loder's former residence, at the time he came to warn the manager of the impending riot, he was, for a moment, paralyzed with admiration, at the sudden beholding of her rare and exquisite loveliness; and when he heard the tender tones of her voice, a sweet cord of memory was touched, and a dream of the past came rushing o'er his mind. And again, when those pleasant tones trilled the appellation of "gentleman," when speaking of the begrimed miner, the young man was still more entranced, and from that moment there had been a melody singing lightly in his heart, which had called into life hopes and anticipations which he had thought never again to experience.

From that moment the purposes and aims of his life had changed. He experienced desires which otherwise would never have been aroused; and, like the Arab, he would have folded his tent, and as quietly stolen away from the life of a miner, had not he been drawn into the vortex of the scenes of excitement which had succeeded this new revelation in his life.

Each succeeding hour had increased Sandie's enchantment; and when he began to realize that Gertie really took an interest in his fate, his joy became keener and his hopes brighter and more promising of a glorious final fulfillment.

His admiration had deepened in an intense

and soul-inspired love. One possibility, in the rapture of the moment, had never entered his brain; he had not dreamed that it could be possible that another possessed already the rich benison of Gertie's love. Therefore our readers will readily understand the cause and depth of his emotion, upon suddenly becoming convinced of the fact that another held Gertie's love, and on his unexpected sudden beholding the two lovers together.

For a moment, after struggling with the first excitement of his discovery, Sandie stood and gazed sadly and enviously upon the pretty tableau presented, and was just upon the point of turning away, when suddenly he beheld the shadow of a person thrown across the ray of light which flashed from the windows, and the next instant he saw the figure of a man steal stealthily and unobserved across in the same direction.

CHAPTER XIX.

UPON seeing this dark shadow crossing the glare of light, which flashed from the windows of the house, a cold chill of danger and impending peril crept over Sandie's form.

For a moment he lost all trace of the stranger's form; and he made a complete circuit of the house without regaining a view of it.

"Can it be possible," he soliloquized, "that I am the victim of an optical illusion? Twice have I seen this ill-betiding figure—this strange, voiceless shadow, and then again has it mysteriously disappeared. Am I losing my reason, or am I really the selected victim of some specter from the grave?"

Twice, without the radius of light which flashed from the house, and unobserved, Sandie made a circuit of the premises without recognizing the least indication of the supposed presence of the man whom he thought he had seen, and he was much perplexed. The mysterious disappearance would indicate that his fancy had played him some strange freak; and yet, on the other hand, common sense proclaimed that his horse had not been fooled by his imagination, when he was so suddenly terrified upon the road along by the dangerous ledge, beneath which lurked death for an unwary rider.

Still, as after the most careful search, Sandie could see no one, he was compelled to believe that possibly he had confounded the figure of the man who had disappeared behind the engine-house, with the latter figure which he had seen pass across the ray of light from the house; and that the former may possibly have been a dangerous customer, who had been foiled by his own wariness, and that the latter might most likely be some person attached to the house, possibly Mike, the Irishman who had assisted in the defense of the mansion, when attacked by the miners. It did not seem probable that the first individual could have reached the vicinity quickly enough to have been the original of the second appearance.

Coming again to the front of the house, Sandie took a safe position behind a hedge, secure from observation, and resolved for a few moments to gaze, for the last time, upon the face of the beautiful woman who had caused hopes to bud in his bosom, which were cruelly nipped ere they had fully bloomed. Without a feeling of envy or jealousy, this noble man stood and gazed upon this picture of happiness and bliss. As long as Gertie was happy, Sandie was satisfied.

Long and earnestly he contemplated her lovely face and exquisitely graceful form, watching each pleasant emotion, aided by the light which flashed from the windows, rippling over her truly angelic features. He saw the love-light in her eyes, the flush of maiden tenderness upon her cheeks, and the confiding smile which illuminated and enhanced the general charm which constituted the *tout ensemble* of her whole countenance. Ever and anon, her pleasant, silvery laugh rippled out upon the clear night air, as some witty remark of her companion fell upon her ears. He, too, the handsome, proud, dark-looking man, with a fine, stern face, and military air and bearing, appeared to be wooed by her gentle spirit into a condition of exquisite and holy calm.

Still Sandie gazed fascinated by the happiness which was another's, and which, for a few brief days, he had fondly hoped might have been his.

At length, with a weary sigh, and a heavy sadness at his heart, he turned away, feeling that he could witness the scene no longer with-

out giving a wild, incoherent utterance to his own agonized disappointment.

He had proceeded but a few steps when he felt an uncontrollable impulse to return and glance once more, even if but for a moment, upon the tableau which pictured what might have been, but which in reality doomed him from hence to walk the balance of the journey of life a disappointed and lonely man. Retracing his steps a short distance, he suddenly stopped and exclaimed:

"No, no! why can I not be a man at once? I might linger and gaze at that enchanting face for the balance of my life? but no, I will be a man and meet my future of lonely misery at once!" and again he turned away.

This time he proceeded still further than at first, fully resolved never to look upon Gertie's face again; but a strange, weird influence, not born of his own personal desire, seemed to urge him to turn back, and the second time he faced about, and advanced to a position from whence he could once more gaze upon her.

Climbing over the side-rail furthest from where the two unsuspecting lovers stood, was the same dark, mysterious figure which upon two occasions previously upon this same night his startled gaze had fallen.

Slowly but warily, and with a cat-like step, the tall, dark figure approached toward the two young people, who, standing with their backs toward him, and gazing at the clear moon sailing gracefully past the rifts of clouds, were too intently engaged with each other to be aware of the approach of the dark, threatening stranger so stealthily and suspiciously drawing near to them.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed Sandie, mentally, but unable to give utterance to his thoughts; "she will be murdered right before my eyes, and I am helpless!"

Still unconscious of their danger, the two innocent persons stood and enjoyed the beauties which surrounded them. Suddenly a clear, musical laugh rang out upon the silent air; but an instant later, the music of innocent laughter ended in a prolonged shriek of terror. Gertie had turned suddenly, and her eyes fell upon the form of the assassin. With a fierce yell of rage, the latter, seeing that he was discovered, sprang forward, holding aloft in his hand a formidable knife, which glittered and flashed in the light from the window.

The suddenness of the discovery of this threatening figure for a moment seemed to freeze Gertie's companion with terror, and it appeared as though he, too, would prove powerless to raise an arm in the doomed girl's defense.

But only for an instant did this shock of horror prevail; the next saw Gertie suddenly jerked back, and his form placed between her and the assassin.

"Be it thou first, and then the girl," growled the assassin, fiercely, as he advanced still nearer, and raised his knife to plunge into the unarmed man's bosom. But even as the giant murderer's arm descended, a sharp report rang out upon the air, and the knife fell from the villain's grasp, while his arm fell powerless to his side, as though stricken by palsy, or a bolt of lightning.

With a howl of pain and rage, the monster started back a step; and then suddenly, with his uninjured hand, he drew a pistol from his jacket, cocked it with his teeth, and leveling it straight at the man's heart, was about to fire. At this moment a dark figure sprang forward, knocked the weapon from his grasp with a powerful blow, and sought to seize him and close in for a desperate struggle. But the assassin leaped back, and with one bound sprang over the railing of the piazza, and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. LODER came rushing from the house with the amazed inquiry:

"Great heavens! what is the matter? What does this mean? Who fired that pistol-shot? and what alarmed Gertie?" exclaimed Mr. Loder, without waiting for any one of his rapidly asked questions to be answered. Gertie herself was the first to speak.

"Oh, uncle, uncle!" she exclaimed, "I and Edgar would have been murdered in cold blood, if it had not been for the bravery and coolness of Mr. Carmichael! He appears to be our guardian angel!"

Turning to Sandie, Mr. Loder said:

"Come, tell me the facts. If a murder has

been attempted, the assassin may still be lurking in the vicinity."

When our hero gave his reason for visiting the manager's house, a strange, sad light shone in Gertie's eyes, and had the former observed it, and been less modest, he would have been mystified, even if all the old hopes which but a few short moments ago he had bid good-bye to forever had not been wholly revived; but he did not see the expression upon her face, nor notice the glance in her eyes, and the brave heart still lay heavy in his bosom, and no joy-beats were mingled with its throbs, as he stood and answered Mr. Loder's quick, sharp questions.

"Had you any suspicions, when driving by the engine-room, who the dark figure was that so strangely crossed your path?"

"Yes, sir; I had a suspicion."

"Who did you imagine this scoundrel to be?"

"Thumping Brad, the leader of the miners' riot."

"Impossible!"

"No, sir; I could not be mistaken, when my eyes once fell clearly upon that man's face. I know his villainous countenance too well."

"But you must be mistaken; Thumping Brad was removed to the state prison to-day!"

"I know that he was to have been, but it seems that he was not."

"Is it possible that he could have escaped?"

"It is certain that he has his freedom, and is roaming this neighborhood, seeking vengeance upon those who brought him to justice."

"But why should he wish to murder my niece? She certainly had no hand in bringing him to justice."

"I think that he believed, in the darkness, that this gentleman was yourself; and he would not hesitate to murder your niece, because by that foul deed he would cause you anguish by sacrificing her."

Mr. Loder stood for a few moments lost in thought, when Gertie availed herself of this opportunity to approach Sandie, and, with tears in her eyes, she in earnest language expressed her gratitude.

While Gertie was speaking, Sandie stood motionless, with a countenance as pale as marble, and with his lips compressed as though struggling to repress some powerful emotion. Finally, interrupting Gertie's expressions of gratitude, he said:

"Miss Loder, you attach too great importance to a simple act, which any man, under the circumstances, would have been proud to have performed."

"And yet, is it not a strange destiny that should always ordain that you should be near when great peril assails any member of my uncle's family?"

"No; it is not a strange destiny, but a very ordinary one. I was a worker in your uncle's mine; a few bad men were inclined to commit outrages: I was opposed to violence, and arrayed myself against these evilly disposed men. This circumstance brought me in connection with the tragic events which followed, and as your family were the objects of assault, I naturally fell in as an avowed champion of the manager and his family."

"Yes, but what inspired you to become our friend? I am sure that had it not been for you we might have all been murdered upon that fatal night. And then how was it that you were the only miner that volunteered to defend us?"

"I doubt not, Miss Loder, that a majority of the miners would rather have defended you than have harmed you. There were but a portion of the men engaged in the riot, and a majority of those were the victims of bad liquor and worse counsels; and furthermore, they had no idea, when led by the bad ones, to what extremes their leaders intended to proceed. These men felt that they had certain wrongs to redress, and started out with the design only of obtaining their rights; but frequently an assemblage of the best disposed men may, in the excitement of the moment, be led to countenance excesses which in calmer moments they would sooner die than commit."

"You appear to be strangely prejudiced in favor of the miners?" spoke up Mr. Loder.

"Yes, sir, I am," replied Sandie, promptly.

"You are enthusiastic in defense of them."

"Yes, sir, I am, because I am one of them, and know the hardships that they endure."

During all this conversation the gentleman who had been standing alone with Gertie upon the balcony, and who was thereby a joint object

of attack with her, now joined in the conversation by exclaiming:

"Is it possible that this noble and cultivated man must always continue to work in the mines?"

"Yes, sir," replied Sandie, in a tone in which was mingled a slight mixture of bitterness; "I am only a miner, and I see no reason to be ashamed of my vocation."

"Excuse me, I did not mean to speak disparagingly; I was only surprised that a man of your presence and evident accomplishments should have chosen such a vocation."

"You are not more surprised, Edgar, than we all have been during the last few weeks. Our brave friend here chooses to shroud himself in mystery; yet I hope the day will come when we will—"

At this instant Mr. Loder's words were cut short by a sharp report and a sudden flash, which illuminated the night.

The next instant Sandie Carmichael wheeled around, reached forth his hands as though to grasp at something, and then with a heavy groan staggered forward, and ere either of the surprised and terrified by-standers could reach forward to save him, fell prone upon his face, insensible and gasping, at their feet.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR an instant Mr. Loder stood irresolute, seemingly too much surprised and shocked by the suddenness of the tragedy, to know what to do; but after lights were brought, and blood was seen ebbing from Sandie's bared breast, he hesitated no longer. Calling upon Edgar for assistance, they together bore the wounded man into the house. Mike, who now appeared upon the scene, was ordered to harness a horse, and speed away for a physician, after stopping at the residence of Mr. Tilton, and directing him to hasten to the manager's home as quickly as possible.

Having thus put matters in train for the caring of the noble young man who had most probably lost his life in his service, Mr. Loder took down a rifle from the kitchen wall, and told Edgar to arm himself.

"What do you intend to do, brother?" cried Miss Loder.

"I intend to hunt that rascal and assassin until I run him to the earth; and then," and as Mr. Loder spoke a terrible expression settled upon his stern countenance; "and then," he repeated, "I will act as judge, jury, and executioner to this wretch, who has stricken down this noble youth, even upon my own threshold."

"Be not rash, my dear brother; neither leave me now; I fear that this noble man is wounded unto death."

"And he has sacrificed his life to save ours!" exclaimed Gertie.

"I know it, my dear; but your uncle can place officers of the law upon Brad's track; it is not necessary that he should run any risk himself!"

"Uncle will do as he thinks best; but, aunt, if I were a man, I would pursue that murderer unto the ends of the earth!" And there was a fierce gleam in Gertie's eyes, and a determined look upon her beautiful features, which seemed suddenly to have assumed the clear hardness of chiseled marble as she spoke.

Further discussion was terminated for the time being, by signs of returning life in the wounded man. This indication caused Mrs. Loder to ply her remedies with renewed vigor, and, after a season, Sandie opened his eyes, and said in a feeble voice:

"What has happened to me?"

Motioning Gertie to leave the room, or retire from the vicinity of Brad's victim, Mr. Loder advanced, and said:

"My brave friend, you were the victim of Thumping Brad's treachery."

"Then I have been wounded?"

"Yes, my friend, you have; but we hope for the best."

"You hope for the best! Then you think that my wound is fatal?"

"You are a brave man; death hath no terrors for you, and I will conceal nothing. I believe that your wound is fatal; but we can not tell, certainly, until the physician arrives."

"Where am I wounded?"

Mr. Loder was about to speak, when Aunt Susan again shook her finger at him warningly, and herself replied:

"You had better defer asking any more questions until the doctor's arrival, then he can tell you all about it; all we can do is to guess."

Again silence pervaded the room for a few moments, when suddenly all were startled by a scream from Aunt Susan, who knelt beside Sandie, with her face turned toward the windows, while the rest of those assembled about the sufferer, stood with their backs toward them. As she gave utterance to a quick, sharp scream, Aunt Susan pointed toward the windows, and when the others turned they at once saw the same object which had been the cause of her exclamation of alarm.

It had been a night of alarms and surprises; still this latter was none the less startling in its nature, for there, with his features flattened against the window, was the dark visage of a dark, tawny-faced man, with fierce, staring eyes, and long, black hair streaming loosely upon his shoulders.

Grasping his rifle, Mr. Loder was about rushing forth, when Gertie seized his arm, and holding him back, exclaimed:

"Be careful, uncle, it's Sandie's friend!"

"Who is it, do you say?"

"It's Sandie's friend, Indian Joe!"

Even while Gertie spoke, the face disappeared from the window, and the next moment Indian Joe, in full war paint, stalked into the room.

Those who had been in the habit of seeing the old chief only in his semi-civilized dress, were amazed at the wonderful transformation the Indian paraphernalia made in his appearance.

For a moment he gazed at Sandie, and his bosom heaved, but not a sound fell from his lips, only the significant and habitual guttural exclamation:

"Ugh! ugh!"

Sandie at once recognized the chief, and said, extending his hand:

"I am glad to see you, Joe; your white friend is going to the happy hunting grounds!"

"Brad shoot?" said Indian Joe.

"Yes, it was Brad; he has dropped me at last; and my only wish is that he will be satisfied, and that I will prove the only victim of his evil vengeance."

"Brad escaped from jail?"

"Yes; he must have escaped, because I am sure that it was he."

"Ugh! Injun kill Brad."

As Joe said this, the fierce light in his eyes grew fiercer, and his great brown hand clutched convulsively at the handle of a large bowie knife which was slung on his belt.

"How Brad shoot? Tell Injun," said Joe, after a moment.

Mr. Loder, laying aside his rifle, related all that Sandie had told him, and then supplemented his own account of what had occurred subsequently. As the manager proceeded, the Indian leaned forward and listened with the eagerness of an Eastern devotee listening to the oracles of one of their priests.

The picture presented was a grand one. Upon the floor lay Sandie; beside him stood Miss Loder; a short distance back of her, Gertie; and in the foreground Mr. Loder, with the chief, in his fantastic attire, leaning forward in a listening attitude.

When Mr. Loder had concluded his account, Indian Joe moved toward the door, muttering, between constant exclamations and grunts:

"White man's a fool! white man's a fool!"

"Stop! what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Loder, stepping before Joe.

"I mean," said the old chief, "Brad no done yet. Brad shoot again, sure."

And as a singular corroboration of the chief's words, at that very instant a ball came crashing through the window-pane.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT the hour of midnight, upon the evening when Sandie Carmichael rode along the ledge road, and encountered his little hide-and-seek game with the tall, dark figure, which he subsequently identified as Thumping Brad the outlaw, a number of dark figures at intervals might have been seen stealthily moving along the same road in squads of twos and threes.

There was a singular cautiousness in their movements, which indicated something not less mysterious in their intentions, as they all spoke in low whispers, and were constantly sending several of their number to different points, to watch and see that no one who was not acquainted with, or interested in their purposes, was a chance spectator of their doings. That their gathering was an important one, and intended to be as secret as the grave, was indicated beyond question.

A deep feeling of resentment pervaded the bosoms of the miners against Mr. Loder, and more especially against Sandie.

Thumping Brad was looked upon as a martyr to their demands for increased wages; and Sandie as the direct cause and promoter of his martyrdom.

As is generally known, there is an association or secret brotherhood, whose ramifications extend throughout the whole community of miners; it is not confined to any one mine, district, or state, but, like masonry, has its grand lodge, which is the fountain-head and the source from whence all rules, regulations, and special mandates issue.

These conclaves were as secret as death; and a sudden judgment upon some one who had become liable to their decrees was frequently the result of their deliberations. They recognized the fact that in union there is strength, and in secrecy there is safety.

A summons to attend one of these secret meetings was the occasion of the assembling of so many of the miners at this weird hour of the night, at the head of the shaft, as above described, and also explains the mystery of their cautious and stealthy movements, as they were in constant dread of the approach of spies and informers, who would come

"Like a chiel among them o' takin' notes."

Finally, the last brother expected reached the head of the shaft, and at once measures were completed for their descent. The connection was broken between the wheel by which descents were made by the aid of steam power, and the apparatus was adjusted to a second arrangement, which was intended to be worked by hand, and which was used as a substitute when the engine needed repairing, or was stopped from any cause whatever.

By the hand arrangement only two or three men could be lowered at a time; and yet it was not long before all but the two left above to work the windless were down at the foot of the shaft, deep, deep, into the black depths of the earth,

"Where the dog-star never glows."

Once below, all stealthiness and caution ceased.

Lighting their torches, the men formed a procession, marching in single file through several cuts, and along narrow passages, from the walls of which could be heard the constant drip, drip, of the water which oozed forth, and formed a puddle of considerable depth beneath their feet. At length they emerged from one of those narrow roadways, into a large chamber—an exhausted "breast"—which had been excavated here and there in several directions, leaving quite an open space in the center, from which branched passages leading into different workings.

"Brothers," said one of the miners who had taken his seat in the center of the circle, "this convocation of the brotherhood will now come to order, and business will proceed." For a moment a pause ensued, when at length the miner who had called the meeting to order, and by his movements was evidently the elected head of this particular lodge, arose again and said:

"Brothers, this meeting for to night has been called for the transaction of the most important business that has ever engaged our attention since we have been banded together. We have with us to-night a deputy, bringing with him the proper credentials from the grand lodge of the brotherhood. Brothers, the sad news—the painful news—has come over the mountains, the rivers, and the vales to us, that a traitor—an informer—has arisen among you; and that through his instrumentality one of your number has been slain, and another is at present an inmate of a prison cell." After speaking for full thirty minutes, he suddenly exclaimed: "And now, brothers, with you remains the judgment! What is your verdict? It is for you to pronounce the traitor's doom, and for us to execute your judgment!"

Wild, fierce shouts now re-echoed through the gloomy depths, as one after another exclaimed: "Let him die! let him die! Our verdict is death—death to all traitors and informers!"

"And this is your formal verdict—this is your judgment?"

"It is; let the informer die!" came in one unanimous shout from the begrimed and excited group.

At this instant a sudden shout of rage and vengeance burst from the lips of the terribly

excited miners, as the figure of a man emerged from one of the passages, and with a rapid step, approached directly toward them.

"A traitor! a traitor! an informer!" shouted the men, now wrought up to a condition of absolute fury.

"Hold!" thundered the new-comer. "Listen to me!" and as he approached nearer within the circle of light, the startled men observed that his clothes were tattered, and that his features were pale and bloody, as though he had just escaped from some terrible combat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

For a few moments a scene of terrible excitement ensued. Weapons were drawn, and it appeared as though the stranger who had so mysteriously and inopportunely come among them would be literally hacked to pieces, when suddenly one of the men exclaimed:

"An' may I die where I stand, if the man is not Thumping Brad himself!"

Finally, when the wild excitement was sufficiently quieted, Brad was led forward and escorted to the middle of the circle, as the men, in obedience to the shouted command of their presiding officer, again resumed their seats.

"Brothers, will we hear from our comrade Brad?"

"Ay! ay! hear! hear!" shouted the men. "Let the man who has suffered in our cause speak," came from a dozen throats.

Brad stepped forward a step or two, stopped, and slowly cast his eyes around the whole circle, carefully scanning each face; at length, in a hoarse voice, he inquired:

"An' is it settled that we have no traitors or informers among us at this moment?"

Brad repeated his question; this time he raised his voice almost to a yell, and his bloody face was convulsed with passion, his great bosom heaved with excitement, his eyes burned with a lurid light, and his giant form fairly trembled in its tattered covering as he added:

"I am an outlaw, an' my hands are already red with the blood of one informer! I might as well die for an ox as a sheep! Then answer me, is there a traitor among us, or are all here assembled true and loyal brothers?"

The presiding officer of the meeting was the first to break the terrible silence which a second time succeeded this fearful inquiry, and he said: "To the best of our knowledge, there are none but brave men, and comrades true and loyal, present this night!"

"Have ye searched, tried, and tested?" cried Brad.

"There are none present but the sworn members of the brotherhood!"

"An' thou'rt sure of this? An' I tell thee there might be an error made!"

"There can be no error; each man gave the password at the head of the shaft!"

"An' if thou'rt sure, man, it is well; for I tell ye, that the demon of these mines, the terrible fire-damp with its lieutenant, and not less deadly agent, the choke-damp, are not more dangerous to thee and me at this moment than a foul informer!"

"Let every man be sworn!" said a voice.

"Ay! ay! let every man be sworn!" called out a dozen others.

"It is not necessary," said the presiding officer. "I will stand responsible with my life for every man present!"

"What brought ye here to-night? What occasion was there for a meeting of the brotherhood?"

"We met to talk of vengeance for the murder of one comrade and the imprisonment of another."

A grim smile overspread Brad's mangled face, as he inquired:

"An' who was the man on whom ye sought to take vengeance?"

"Sandie Carmichael!"

"An' then ye may save yer breath!"

"What dost thou mean, man?"

"I mean that Sandie Carmichael, curse him, has already paid the penalty of his treachery!"

"How so, man?"

"He is dead!"

"Dead!" came in general chorus from the miners.

"Ay, dead!" answered Brad, with a horrid oath, and not less horrible chuckle.

"An' by whose hand?"

"Mine, comrades! he fell wounded unto death less than three hours ago; and as all traitors and informers must fall, as long as

Brad the miner has an arm to level a pistol and a forefinger to pull a trigger!"

"An' how came it, man, that thou'rt free to avenge thine own and our wrongs?"

"They have not a prison that can hold Brad, nor can an enemy escape his vengeance, nor—"

At this moment Brad was interrupted by the sudden appearance among them of one of the miners who had been left at the top of the shaft, who came rushing in pale and breathless. At once he, like Brad, was surrounded by an anxious and inquiring group of miners.

"Ay, man, what brings thee here? an' of what evil tidings art thou the bearer?"

"There must be another traitor and informer among us! We have been tracked to the shaft!" he exclaimed.

"Are they upon us?" asked the leader.

"No; but they are watching the head of the shaft."

"How many, and who are they?"

"There are but two, as far as we could discover. The one is Mr. Loder himself; the other, an odd-looking figure, such as we have never seen before."

"Silence comrades, and listen!" cried Brad. And at once every sound was hushed as he resumed: "To-night I tracked Sandie Carmichael to the new residence of the manager: twice I attempted to kill him, but was baffled. Finally, in searching for him, I saw equally as good game; it was the manager himself, talking lovingly with his niece, upon the piazza of his house. I stole upon them in a moment, and I would have had my knife buried in his bosom, when my evil genius, Sandie Carmichael, rose before me, and for the present saved the millionaire tyrant's life. But—ha! ha! ha!—shortly after I had my revenge. They were standing in a group upon the stoop, Sandie, the informer, in their midst, the hero of the moment, when, with this good right hand, I raised my pistol, fired, and the traitor, coward, and informer fell, pierced to the heart. He is one—who shall be number two?"

"But what brings the manager here to the shaft?"

"That scoundrel, Indian Joe, has trailed me here; and if I live a week, he shall be number two; and then the manager himself shall be number three!"

For a moment the men stood and gazed at each other; their faces were clothed with a look of anxious inquiry, when Brad again spoke and said:

"Comrades, I am now an outlaw. A price will be set upon my head. Will ye stand by me to the death?"

The men's lips were formed for a unanimous reply, when the flash of a pistol illuminated the entrance to one of the side passages, and was immediately succeeded by the report of a firearm, which rolled, grumbled, and resounded through the caverns like the roll of distant thunder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN the bullet crashed through the window, coming as an instant and remarkable confirmation of Indian Joe's suspicions, the old chief, followed by Mr. Loder, bounded out of the door, and started away in rapid pursuit of the assassin through the darkness.

"Brad, stop! or Injun shoot!" called the old chief, as he came up with the assassin.

But Brad paid no heed to this suggestive invitation to surrender, and having reached the high-road, and knowing that Joe was quite an old man, he had no idea but what he could soon distance him.

Suddenly a report sounded in his ear, and a bullet whistled across his shoulder, in close proximity to his head; still he did not slacken his pace, but kept along, and after proceeding some distance became convinced that he was holding his own, if not actually gaining a little upon his pursuer.

Again a pistol ball whistled near him; and soon again another came hissing and singing over his head. Still he kept on, his hope being that he might reach the buildings about the mouth of the shaft, when, he doubted not, but that he would be able to throw the old chief off his trail amid the many heaps of debris and lumber which there abounded.

On, on they sped. The miner, with a thrill of hope, saw the buildings about the shaft looming up in the distance; still he felt also that his strength and wind were failing him, and finally he began to realize that his speed was decreas-

ing; and at the same time became conscious that the chief was gaining upon him.

A thought struck him; he still had some charges remaining in his weapon. Turning quickly, he came to a dead halt, took deliberate aim, and fired; and instantly, with a wild shout of triumph, saw his pursuer stagger forward, and tumble all in a heap in the middle of the road.

"You are settled!" he murmured, as he turned about, and again started on a trot toward the mouth of the shaft.

The moon, which up to this moment had shone out clear and bright, suddenly became veiled behind a mass of clouds which gracefully floated before it; and so dense was the cloud that the whole landscape was completely shrouded in darkness.

Brad well knew the many windings of the road, and by slackening his pace, was able, after awhile, to group his way to the mouth of the shaft.

Down, down he clambered, with a sure hand and remarkable presence of mind, and with a rapidity which would have done credit to an experienced acrobat. But it was a terrible strain upon his muscles, and as he descended from beam to beam, he at length began to feel that his strength was failing him. Weaker and weaker he became. He was naturally a man of immense strength, but he had undertaken this terrible feat after a most exhausting chase and a continued series of excitements, which had told fearfully upon his great strength. Finally he felt that he could stand the strain no longer; each moment his brawny hand took a weaker grasp, and he knew not how near he was to the bottom. After all his desperate struggles, he began to realize that he was to be overtaken by a terrible fate. Alone in that narrow passage leading down to the gloomy caverns beneath, with a wild, despairing look, he raised his head and glanced upward to see if he could judge of the distance to the bottom. Through the streak of darkness which enveloped the shaft-way, he could see a faint break which showed him the mouth of the shaft.

Unconsciously, and for the first time in many years, an instinctive prayer for mercy rose to his lips, and again he sought to descend. Thus trembling and praying, he managed to let himself down a short distance further, when suddenly his grasp relaxed, the hold of safety upon which he clung melted from his clasp, and with one wild yell of agony he went whirling through black space.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT the time Thumping Brad discharged his pistol at Indian Joe, during their midnight chase, the old chief had not been hit by the bullet, but observing the miner's intention to shoot, he had sought to check his speed suddenly, and in so doing lost his balance and fell.

The fall for a moment disabled Joe, and by the time he had recovered his feet, the miner had disappeared; and as the former started to renew the pursuit, he heard rapid footsteps in his rear, and a moment later Mr. Loder came rushing up.

"Has the villain escaped?" exclaimed the manager, breathlessly.

"No; Injun no let him escape; Injun fall lucky—Brad shoot—miss Injun—ugh! Joe all right."

"He fired at you, did he?"

"Yes; no hit, tho'; Injun fall; lucky fall; save Injun!"

Mr. Loder questioned the Indian still further, and after ascertaining all the facts, he said:

"Probably Brad has made toward the shaft."

Arriving in the vicinity of the buildings surrounding the mouth of the shaft, they took a short cut, by a pathway which led around behind the building across open ground, where they would be less likely to be suddenly surprised and fired upon by the outlaw.

This path soon brought them to a small hill-ock, from whence they could survey the road leading to the buildings, and also command a clear view of the ground and sheds about the shaft.

"Look!" exclaimed old Joe, suddenly, at the same time giving utterance to the characteristic grunt, "more than two—more than three—Brad's friends come to help him. Ugh! Injun thought so!"

Looking in the direction indicated by the old chief, Mr. Loder saw the dim outlines of the forms of several men stealing cautiously along toward the mouth of the pit.

"Those are miners!" exclaimed the manager, in an under-tone.

"Yes; ugh! there comes more; something is up," answered Joe.

"I would give a thousand dollars," unconsciously muttered Mr. Loder, "to be a secret witness of the gathering; and what is more, it is most probable that Brad himself has found an opportunity to communicate with some of the men, and is the instigator of this gathering."

Thus they watched until the majority of the men had descended the shaft, when Mr. Loder incautiously coughed. The men placed about the shaft to guard against a sudden surprise, heard the sound, and at once they held a whispered consultation.

"Miners heard that," said Joe; "bad manager—no good on trail."

"I am not aware that it makes much difference whether they heard me or not, as I intend to approach them and find out the intent of the meeting. They have a right in the mine only when work is going on."

"Thought manager wanted to hear what miners said down in the mine?"

"I do."

"Injun take manager down—see all—hear all."

"How will you get down there without letting the men at the shaft know it?"

"Kill men at shaft—then manager and Injun go down."

"No, Joe; we must find some other way, if at all, to discover the purpose of the miners' secret gathering," said Mr. Loder.

"Then manager must wait."

Thus a full hour passed. The manager and the old chief remained watching, while the miners' sentries also were evidently upon the alert. At length, Mr. Loder's patience becoming exhausted, he was about to rise to his feet, when a warning cry from the Indian caused him to lie low again.

Bending his ear to the ground, old Joe said: "Hist!"

A few moments brought Mr. Tilton to the shaft, where Mr. Loder joined him, and was delighted to recognize in his companions the inside and outside bosses.

"What is the matter? What is going on now?" inquired Mr. Tilton, anxiously.

Mr. Loder rapidly outlined all that had occurred during the last few hours, when Mr. Tilton said:

"I received an intimation about half an hour ago, that the miners were assembling at the shaft, from one of the mule-boys."

"Yes, there are at least two score of them below."

"What had better be done?"

One of the bosses now spoke, and said:

"It will be dangerous to go down the mine, and I would suggest that we go away and leave the men to ascend without molesting them; we can find out to-morrow, by some means, the object of the meeting."

"But Brad is down there, and if we go away, he may ascend and escape."

"I do not think there is much danger of that, as he could have no safer hiding-place than in the many passages down in the mine."

"But they may be hatching some foul conspiracy."

"We can not gain anything by going down the mine, even if they are; and it would be madness for any one to descend among such a crowd, where they are bound by oaths so terrible. Several men might be killed, and the actual murderer would never be known."

After some further consultation, it was determined to act upon the suggestion of the inside boss; and the party left the mouth of the pit, all save Indian Joe. The latter stole away in the night, mumbling and muttering to himself, and was soon out of sight, hidden among the sheds and debris which surrounded the shaft.

CHAPTER XXVI.

At the time, as previously described in a former chapter, when the news was announced to the assembled brotherhood, that the miners had been tracked, and that the fact of their gathering had become known, as recorded, in the midst of the excitement a pistol was suddenly discharged.

A wild consternation followed the flash and report; the majority of the men concluded that, by a concerted movement, they were to be fired upon promiscuously, by a sheriff's armed posse, from the entrances to the many passages

leading into the chamber where the meeting had taken place.

"Extinguish your torches!" shouted the man who was the leader of the secret gathering.

"Ay, comrades!" called another, "the minions of the owners are upon us!"

"Lay low, comrades!" again called a voice, and the men fell upon their faces.

Thus full ten minutes passed, when a few of the most prominent, among whom was Thumping Brad, held a whispered consultation.

"Can it be possible, man, that we have been needlessly alarmed?"

"Ay, man; but I believe we have," answered Brad.

"It may be that we extinguished the lights too quickly!"

"Not a moment, for safety; and we can light them again easy enough, an' we did."

"We'll risk the lighting of one torch. We can go away to one corner, lest, as we are, we might remain until morning."

"You're right. Give me a torch and a few matches. I'll chance it!"

Taking a torch, Brad, who was well acquainted with the bearings of the chamber, and who had been less excited all through than any of the rest of them, crawled over to one corner, struck a match, and a moment later arose to his feet bearing a flaming flambeau. Then cautiously he made a circuit of the chamber, peering cautiously into the depths of each passage. After passing to them all he called out:

"Dang it, men! an' ye have been frightened by shadows. Light your torches and stand to your feet like men!"

Quickly all the torches were again lighted.

"From whence came the flash and report of the pistol?" said Brad.

"It was I that fired at the face of a man looking from yonder passage," answered one of the men, in a low, tremulous tone of voice.

"It was thou, was it, man? then thou be hanged as a craven and a fool, to cause thy inmates such a fright!"

"An' I saw a strange face, an' fired at it," spoke up the miner, in a bolder voice.

"Ay; it was in thine own cowardly brain that thou sawest the face, sawney."

"Not on my life was it; an' it was face I have gazed upon before; an' I'm not mistaken."

"Then whose face did'st thou see, man?"

"The face of Indian Joe; an' I'm a liar if I did not."

"Indian Joe!" fairly shouted Brad, his bloody face becoming suddenly convulsed with surprise.

"Ay; it was the face of the old Indian, an' no mistake," replied the miner.

"How could the Indian get into the mine, I'd like to ask?" said one of the men.

"Dang it, easy enough! most likely the same way as I came myself not long since."

"An' how was that, Brad?"

"Most ways by my own will, climbing down the frame-work, and about twenty-five feet whirling through the darkness, whether I would or no!"

"An' it was a wonder that thou wert not killed, man."

"Ay; but I was almost; but fortunately I escaped with a few bruises. Ay, I tell then, mates, Brad ain't going to 'croak' until a few more of his foes have been planted first."

"Well, what shall we do further? an' if I'm a judge of time, it's near morning."

"Away, then, all of ye, up the shaft, and give your own reasons for coming down here to all inquirers; and it will not be my fault if ye do not have another meeting, an' that shortly, and without interruption, too. But mind ye, when ye come some hours hence for the labor of the day, don't forget to bring me food; nor need I tell thee not to blab of my presence below here, on your oaths as members of the brotherhood."

Slowly and cautiously the body of miners now made their way through the passages, back toward the foot of the shaft. At any moment they expected that they might fall into a trap, or might be suddenly fired upon.

Without incident, they reached the foot of the shaft, and finding no indication of the descent of any one, save the man who had been let down to warn them of the presence of lookers-on, they gave a signal intended to warn any one at the mouth of the shaft that they were below.

After waiting full three minutes, they were pleased to perceive an answering signal; and, after a moment's consultation, it was decided to send one of their number aloft, to make sure

that they should not fall into any trap at the head of the shaft.

One of the men volunteered to ascend, and jumping into the bucket, the signal was given, and away he was carried, up through the darkness.

Full five minutes passed, when a return signal came, announcing that all was right, and the bucket came down. Thus gang after gang went up, until all were soon again gathered at the mouth of the pit.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE strange events which had occurred upon the night when Sandie Carmichael was shot by Thumping Brad, seemed to have, for the time being, quelled the mutinous spirit of the miners; and, as nothing had been said to them, they resumed work, and things went on as formerly, there being no indications of the resumption of active and violent demonstrations.

For reasons of his own, Mr. Loder had determined not to appear as though he was cognizant of their secret gathering; and thus, for three weeks, matters proceeded quietly.

In the meantime, Sandie had rapidly recovered; the pistol ball, fortunately, having taken such a course as not to make the wound vitally serious, and his naturally strong constitution nobly rallied against the effect of the wound.

The fact of Sandie's recovery was the subject of low, muttered conversations among the miners, when a few of them were gathered where they thought their talk could not be overheard.

The origin of the ghost stories among the mule-boys, must be well known to our readers, and, to more fully explain this phenomenon, we will relate an incident which occurred a week subsequent to the secret meeting down in the mine.

Two of the miners, a couple of men who throughout had been Brad's most earnest champions, were hacking away one forenoon with their picks, at a breast of coal, when suddenly they were startled by a low hist, and the next instant, Brad in person, stood beside them.

The outlaw's appearance was terrible enough, as he brushed back the shaggy locks from his scarred face, and said:

"Good-day to thee, mates; an' what's the news from above?"

"About the same as when we last reported, Brad; we've nothing new to tell thee, my man."

"An' how about Carmichael, the informer?—they tell me, comrades, that the hell-hound of a spy is getting the better of the wound I gave him."

"Ay, with the tender nursing he's getting from the manager's niece, it's so said that he'll soon be about again."

A ferocious expression lowered upon Brad's face, as he exclaimed, with a fierce oath:

"Dang the manager's niece! but she may not be thinking that in nursing that viper back into life she may be stung herself."

"Prithee, man, but if report is true, she is already stung by the hell-hound."

"An' how is that, mates?"

"It is whispered among the women that, with his oily tongue, which gave his mates away, he has won the love of the manager's niece."

A wild, savage laugh burst from Brad's lips as he exclaimed:

"I hope he has, mates!"

"An' why, comrade?"

"An' thou art a pair of fools, an' ye can not see that if such be the case I can cause the wretch more misery than the torture of hell would! Ha! ha! but it's glorious news ye have brought me, mates, and some good night, not far hence, an' I will need thy service to raise me up the shaft."

Sandie Carmichael was fully recovered. For a week he had daily taken a walk, and generally had been accompanied by the fair girl who had generously assisted her aunt in nursing him back to life and health.

Upon a lovely evening we find them walking together. It had been an extremely hot day, and they had deferred going out until the sun had sunk partially behind the hills.

Sandie, as he reached forth his hand, his face beaming with happiness, to assist Gertie over a gully which lay between them, looked little like the coarse, grimy-faced miner who had first been beheld by his companion when he came upon that spring day and asked if Mr. Loder was at home.

As, with his assistance, Gertie leaped over

from one bank to the other, she exclaimed, playfully:

"Well, sir, how strong you are getting!"

"Yes, Miss Loder," replied Sandie, a singular expression suddenly clouding his face, "I'm stronger, and yet weaker."

"There you go, talking mysteriously again. Now, Sir Gentleman, you have frequently promised to explain certain seeming mysteries which surround you, and I shall insist that you unfold to me the strange tale. It is a romantic one I feel certain."

For a moment Sandie looked thoughtful. At length he said abruptly:

"Gertie, who was that gentleman who was standing with you upon the balcony the night that Thumping Brad made his murderous attack upon you?"

"Yes; and when you for the fourth time risked your life to save ours."

"I am not talking nor inquiring about that. You wish me to unravel a mystery for you; but first I wish you to solve a riddle for me."

"What riddle can the identity of that gentleman be to you?"

"A great riddle."

"I can not see how; pray tell me?"

"Miss Loder, this latter fact is another riddle."

"Well, Mr. Strangefellow, I can not see but that you are all mystery and riddle."

"Still, pray tell me."

"Well, there is no secret concerning his identity; you could have learned that fact long ago; he is my dear dead mother's brother."

Sandie started; his face flushed, his eyes were lighted with a strange brightness; he fairly quivered with emotion, as he exclaimed, with tremulous lips:

"And he was not your lover?"

Gertie burst into a merry laugh, at the same time she blushed to a rose-like redness as she answered:

"No, sir, he is not. And this is your riddle?"

"Yes, Miss Loder."

Both had been so absorbed in each other, that neither had noticed that dark clouds had suddenly come crawling over the mountain peaks; and when thus startlingly warned they observed for the first time that such was the fact, and that one of those fearful storms, which in the summer time so frequently occur in the mountains, was upon them.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Sandie, "I have selfishly held your attention until, unawares, a terrible storm has come upon us."

"Don't reproach yourself; but we must seek shelter, and we have but a moment to spare," replied Gertie, bravely.

Sandie cast his eyes about him anxiously, when suddenly, with a thrill of joy, he noticed the entrance to a cave against the side of one of the cliffs which towered above them, a few rods distant.

"Come, Miss Loder," he said, "we may yet be in season to escape a drenching."

They had just succeeded in reaching the entrance to the cave, when three men stole silently through the gathering darkness, and amid the fitful flashes of lightning, up the hill-side, and in the same direction.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHAT a gay gallant you are! and how unlike what thou didst first seem! So come, Mr. Carmichael, or, rather, Sandie, the miner, you must see that I can adopt the idiom of the workmen as well as thou," said Gertie, banteringly, at last.

"An' I would that thou wert but a miner's daughter, and not wishing thee any harm, at that!" exclaimed Sandie, impetuously, with the old look of strange mystery returning to his face.

"And why do you wish that I was a miner's daughter?" inquired Gertie, looking at her companion curiously.

"Because, then I could woo thee!" exclaimed Sandie.

Gertie blushed to the temples.

Again Sandie spoke:

"Yes, beautiful and tender one, if thou wert but a miner's daughter I could woo, an' I'd hope to win."

"And why can't you woo me now?" said Gertie, in a faint, timid voice.

"Because I am a miner."

"What is that to me, I have once asked you."

"Listen, Miss Loder, and tell me truly; your words have often implied that there was some

secret connected with me. Didst thou ever suspect that I was aught else but a miner?"

"Yes, I have."

"Since when?"

"Since the night I saw you first."

A gloomy look came over Sandie's face, as he replied sternly:

"Then you have been mistaken all this time, Miss Loder, for I am nothing but a miner. I never worked at any other business or trade in my life!"

"Well?" said Gertie, shortly.

"Well?" repeated Sandie; and there was a pause.

"Well?" a second time, said Gertie; this time with an increased significance in her emphasis.

"You mean this 'well' as an interrogation?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have I not told you that you were mistaken in your suspicions, and that I am truly a miner?"

"And again I say 'well?' " reiterated Gertie.

"What do you mean by this emphatic *well*?"

"I mean, Sandie Carmichael, that if you were a thousand times a miner, it would not alter nor affect one jot nor tittle my respect for you."

"And could you love a miner?" cried Sandie, earnestly.

"I might, if he asked me to," replied Gertie; "especially if he was a brave and noble man, and had risked his life on several occasions for me; and was, in fact, a hero."

"Then I do ask you to love me; and I can promise you in return a love as pure, and earnest, and enduring as ever found birth in a man's bosom; and can you, oh, Gertie! can you promise to love me, and accept my love in return?"

"I can," answered Gertie, as Sandie extended his arms to encircle her waist; and she was about to speak further, when a thunder-clap fairly shook the walls of the cave in which they stood; and with a sudden exclamation of surprise, Sandie recoiled from her, and gazed, with a fierce glare in his eye, toward the entrance of the cavern, within which, during the foregoing conversation, they had receded.

"Great heavens!" cried Gertie, in sudden terror "what is it?"

"My dear girl," answered Sandie, "we seem to be surrounded by perils. I may be mistaken, but I think that I saw the dark shadow of a well-known form thrown across the entrance to this cave."

"Oh, mercy!" screamed Gertie; "was it that outlaw and assassin Brad?"

"Do not tremble so, nor lose thy courage, dear girl; I will protect you with my life."

"But we will both be murdered!"

"I guess not," replied Sandie, with a slow, steady emphasis upon each word; and as he spoke, he drew a pistol from his pocket, cocked it, and added: "He will not permit me to perish just upon the threshold of a new life; if danger threatens us, we will pass through it safely; and if a foe is near us, let him beware, for now I am a dangerous man!"

"Ay, my young gallant, but I be more dangerous!" called the well-known, harsh, threatening voice of Thumping Brad from without the cave.

"Go thy way, Thumping Brad, or thy moments of life are numbered!" called back Sandie.

"Ay, but thou're a well-versed braggart, Sandie Carmichael, the spy and informer; but I'll not have a struggle with thee now, man, an' thou wilt give up the girl quietly."

"Fiend! ask me to give thee my heart's blood, and I'll do it! but thou shalt not touch the hem of this lady's garment."

"Don't reckon too much, mate; there are two of the brotherhood with me, an' we mean business! An' thou don't give up the girl, we will take her, an' thy heart's blood, too!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"If it's ransom thou'rt after, scoundrel, name thy price, and thou shalt have it!"

"Dang thee, man, wouldst thou buy thyself off with the price that was given thee for betraying thy comrades? Brad is a poor man, and likes the 'shiners,' but would have none of the traitor's and informer's gold!"

"Go thy way and thou shalt have the weight of thy wicked head in solid gold!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Brad, coarsely. "Pretty offers these are from Sandie Carmichael, the miner!"

"But thou shalt have the gold, man, nevertheless, an' thou'lt but go thine own ways!"

"Thou'rt a fool, Sandie! Give up the girl an' thou'lt save thine own carcass!"

"Will you take a price, no matter what it may be?" said Sandie.

"No, I will not," replied Brad, fiercely, "and thou canst take that, thou base informer and betrayer of thy mates!" and as Brad spoke he leaned forward beyond the wall of the entrance to the cave and discharged a pistol straight at Sandie.

The next moment an answering report came from within the cave, and the voice of Sandie called loudly:

"An' thou canst take that, thou fiend!" while at the same time Gertie gave utterance to a cry of terror, and fell forward insensible in his arms.

"Thou'rt armed, lad!" shouted Brad.

"Ay, man, well armed; an' if I get another shot at thy conk I'll send thee home!" replied Sandie, fiercely, as he stripped the coat from his back, placed it upon the floor of the cavern, and gently laid the unconscious form of Gertie upon it, at the same time keeping a wary eye upon the entrance, lest Brad might witness his movements and spring suddenly upon him.

After the discharge of the pistol-shots and the brief dialogue recorded, there was a moment's silence. Sandie, taking his handkerchief from his pocket and wetting it at a little stream which trickled through a crevice and rolled down the side of the cave, bathed the face of Gertie. After a few moments he had the satisfaction of witnessing signs of returning consciousness. Renewing his efforts, he at length succeeded in restoring her wholly, when, raising her in his arms, he bore her back deeper into the recesses of the cavern, fearful lest Thumping Brad might again discharge his weapon.

As he penetrated further into the cave he observed that it became narrower, and at length he found himself in a passage hardly wide enough to permit of further progress.

"We can go no further," he muttered; "nor can Brad and his fellows come here in safety; and yet I dare not keep this dear girl in these damp, gloomy depths much longer."

"Do not fear for me, Sandie, I will not faint again, no matter what happens. Are you not my affianced husband, brave as a lion? And would I not make but a poor wife for one as bold as thee, if I could only prove an incubance in an hour of danger and great peril?"

"Bravely spoken, dear girl; I am not hopeless, but it is not pleasant to be caged like a wild beast in his lair."

"No; but I heard you say that we were safe for the present. If that is so, why can we not quietly wait until that outlaw, Brad, shall go away, or we shall be missed, and some person come to our assistance?"

"I do not think that our chances are good for the occurrence of either of the fortunate alternatives which you mention."

"Then, what can we do? At least, if we must die let us die together."

"My precious one, I hope that our chances are better than you appear to hope. If I could only trust you, I think that I could extricate us both from our present perilous position."

"You can trust me to do whatever you direct."

"Would you dare to remain here alone for a few moments?"

"And permit you to go out and risk your life in a combat with that outlaw Brad?"

"My dear girl, I do not see as we have any other chance."

"But suppose you should be killed, what will become of me?"

"I do not feel that I am to be killed. I have been in even more perilous positions than I am at present, save your presence."

"Oh! I dare not let you go. How imprudent it was for us to come far from home, knowing that Brad was at liberty."

"I did not think that he would dare leave the mine at present."

"Oh, Heaven! would that we were safe."

"If you will permit me to go forward alone, and promise not to leave this place until I bid you to come, we will soon be safe."

"I will do anything that you ask me to, no matter what the consequences may be to myself; I fear alone for you."

"Gertie, night has fallen; Brad is already partially baffled; he does not exactly know what to do, or he would have followed us into the cave; but he dare not. I think that I can take

advantage of his cowardice and indecision, and make him a prisoner ere he is aware of my approach."

"Do as you think best; I will remain here as though I was frozen to the spot, and may Heaven help you!"

"Fear not; I feel an inward confidence that all will soon be right; but under no circumstances must you disregard my command to leave this spot, even though you hear the sound of a struggle going on, lest you might appear at an untoward moment, and be the means thereby of giving an advantage to our enemies."

Brad and his companions, after the exchange of shots, were undecided what to do. An attempt to enter the cave would have been attended with great risk—in fact, an almost certainty of being shot dead in the narrow passage which led into the broader cave beyond.

The outlaw had hoped that Sandie was unarmed; and he had discharged his weapon more for the purpose of ascertaining this fact, than with the design really of shooting Sandie. Recently the purpose of the miner demon toward our hero had materially changed; he had a more diabolical scheme of revenge than the mere taking of Sandie's life, although in the end he meant to have the heart's blood of the man running red upon the blade of his knife.

After waiting some length of time, and hearing no sound within the cave, an idea suddenly struck the outlaw, and he said to one of his companions:

"Blast me, Tom! but I fear that the bloody informer has escaped us after all!"

"An' how could he escape, Brad? No one has come out from the cave."

"Ay, mate, but he may have gone further within, and have found another outlet."

"Thou'rt imagining a long chance, Brad."

"Ay, but it may be possible; this Carmichael, the informer, is a mettlesome lad, an' would most likely have shown fight ere this, if he hadn't dropped upon some better plan."

"Go you in then, man, an' thou'lt soon find out whether or not the game has gone away."

"Hark ye, Tom, it's not many minutes since thou wert hell-fired to go in and drag the informer out, an' it's now thou hast a chance."

"An' if thou'lt say that thou'rt afraid to go thyself, I'll go in."

"I believe in my heart that neither of thee dare go in; an' as I'm appointed by the brotherhood to seek this man, it may be my call to go; an' I will," spoke up the third man, who was a delegate appointed from a distance, as was usual, when an informer was to be disposed of, to make away with Sandie.

"An' if thou dost claim the right to enter first, then we'll not stand against thee, mate."

"Then in it is," said the man; and he advanced toward the entrance to the cave, when Brad called in a whisper:

"Hold, man! drop upon thy knees, an' if the informer fires on thee, the ball will whistle over thy head, instead of stopping its song in thy bosom."

"Thou'rt right, Brad, an' I thank thee for thy caution;" and the fellow dropped upon his belly, and commenced to crawl slowly and warily into the cave, carrying a cocked pistol in his hand, and a large sheath-knife between his teeth.

CHAPTER XXX.

"You will have a care for yourself, Sandie?"

"Have I not every reason that man could have to care for myself? Ay, dear one, more than thou dreamest of. One kiss, and I will go to outwit and conquer, I hope, for the last time, this, my sleuth-hound-like enemy."

And in the darkness of that gloomy cavern, with a deadly peril encompassing them, the first kiss of an acknowledged affection was given and received by these two young lovers, under circumstances such as are seldom recorded in the most exciting situations of intensest romance.

An instant later, and Sandie was slowly retracing his steps, with his pistol cocked in one hand, while the other was extended to feel his way through the darkness along the damp walls of the cave.

With a firm but stealthy step he advanced, until he had reached the narrow outlet leading from the cave, when suddenly he tripped and fell forward, and in a twinkling recognized the object over which he had stumbled as the form of a man.

Neither of the men could see—they could feel each other alone, but both knew that they were in the clutches of a deadly foe.

When Sandie stumbled over his intended assassin, in the sudden shock of the moment he had lost his hold upon his pistol, and it fell from his grasp. Fortunately, also, he had knocked the knife from the teeth of his antagonist; and as in the darkness the two men grasped each other for a life-and-death struggle, Sandie caught his opponent by the wrist of the hand which held the pistol.

Neither spoke, but both breathed hard as they wrestled upon the floor of the narrow entrance for the advantage.

The assassin was a powerful fellow, but Sandie was cooler, and equally as muscular, and, after an instant's struggle succeeded in seizing his antagonist by the throat; but before his grasp tightened, the miner managed to give utterance to one faint cry for help. The next instant, iron fingers pressed like a vise upon his windpipe, and his struggles relaxed. But his cry, although faint, had been heard by his companions without, and Tom, without waiting for a word from Brad, rushed into the cave to his companion's assistance.

In the darkness he could not see, and all sounds of the struggle had suddenly ceased, for Sandie's fingers were slowly, surely squeezing the breath out of the murderer's body. Tom pressed on, when suddenly he, too, fell forward, upon the prostrate forms of Sandie and the other man.

Not knowing friend from foe, he said, in a low whisper as he grasped hold of Sandie:

"An' who art thou—the informer of my mate?"

His mate could not reply, and Sandie would not. This informed Tom that his companion was the undermost man, and, at once he made a furious assault upon the one that was uppermost.

Brad, also, had followed in, knowing that a hand-to-hand struggle was going on; but, more wary and careful than his companion, he felt his way, and avoided stumbling over the combatants.

Quickly ascertaining the state of affairs, he crowded in close against the side of the walls of the cave; and, instead of stopping to assist his comrades, he passed by, leaving them to continue the battle, while he pressed forward to secure the girl. Stumbling and groping, he pushed forward, when a female voice called to him in terrified tones:

"Is that you, Sandie! Are you injured?"

"No; but it is me!" exclaimed Brad, with a low, triumphal chuckle as he leaped forward, and seized Gertie in his arms.

Struggles were unavailing in the arms of the powerful giant; and, in less than two minutes after his entrance into the cave, he passed out again, bearing the now insensible girl in his arms, while the desperate struggle between Sandie and the two assassins continued within the cave.

Even in the fury of the moment, while battling with the two men, Sandie had heard Gertie's inquiry, and also Brad's demoniac laugh, but was powerless to fly to her assistance, being firmly clasped in the convulsive embraces of his antagonists.

His agony was terrible, and his exertions were frantic and almost superhuman, as a moment later he became aware that the outlaw was escaping from the cave with his beloved. And in the agony of the moment his reason almost deserted him, as he frantically sought to free himself.

Finally, all the men struggled to their feet, and in their efforts to gain the advantage, stumbled, tripped, and floundered further into the cave; and still our hero failed to shake himself free from their deadly grasp.

Finally, in wild despair, while still continuing the struggle, and while almost breathless from his exertions, Sandie managed to gasp out:

"Ay, mates, but I'll make ye both rich, an' ye cease the fight!"

"What has thou to make us rich with, thou hell-hound of an informer?"

"Gold! gold!" gasped Sandie.

"Dang it, man! thy heart's blood is the best price we can receive; and we will in spite o' the fight thou'rt making."

At this instant, Sandie's foot struck against something, which at once he conceived to be a knife. At the same moment, one of his antagonists slipped and fell, when he easily threw the other, and was free. Stooping quickly, he grasped the knife from the floor, and sprung toward the outlet from the cave, but in the dark-

ness he slipped and fell, and again the two murderers were upon him.

"Now, on your lives, fools! release you hold, or I'll slay thee!"

"Bah! thou braggart! it is thou that must 'croak!'" and one of the men who had picked up a stone, struck Sandie a heavy blow upon the arm, and was about to repeat the blow, when our hero made a terrible lunge in the darkness, and the knife went slashing into the bosom of one of them. As he drew it forth, the warm blood of the man spurted into his face, and blinded him; while the poor fellow, with a heavy groan, sunk upon the floor, murmuring:

"He's done for me, mate."

"But not for me yet, comrade!" cried the other, with a fierce oath, as catching from the floor a pistol, against which he had tripped, he rained down blow after blow upon Sandie's head.

Blinded, partially stunned, and almost fainting, still the game and intrepid Sandie struck out with his knife, and, finally, with one expiring effort, buried it in the bosom of the last of his assailants, when both sunk, bleeding and unconscious, upon the floor of the cave.

The combat was over; all three of the desperate men lay weltering in their blood—one already a corpse, and the life-blood of the other two fast ebbing away, when suddenly the entrance to the cave was darkened by a human form, and with low mutterings, the latter groped his way through the passage and into the darkness, until he slipped in the life-blood of the men, and stumbled over one of their prostrate and mangled forms.

CHAPTER XXXI.

UPON the same afternoon when Sandie and Gertie went forth to enjoy a walk together, Aunt Susan, the manager's sister, sat upon the piazza of her brother's house, with her knitting in her hands, as is habitual with old maids the world over.

Shortly after she was joined by her brother. A troubled and perplexed look had rested upon her countenance during the whole day, and when her brother came and seated himself beside her, the first words which she addressed to him indicated the thoughts which had exhibited themselves by the shadow upon her brow.

"My brother, I am glad that you have come, as I wish to hold a half hour's conversation with you."

"Well, Susan, I have just half an hour to spare; what do you wish to converse with me about?"

"What do you think of this Sandie Carmichael, the miner?"

"I think he is a brave, intelligent, and noble young man."

"Have you never suspected anything concerning him?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, what direction have your suspicions taken?"

"I have suspected that he is not what he seems."

"Well, have you ever formed an idea what he might be, if he's not a mere miner?"

"He may be a criminal."

"I do not believe it."

"And yet it may be possible that he is."

"No; I do not think that it is possible that a man who has shown as many noble traits of character as he has, can be a criminal."

"Then why has he chosen to hide himself under the garb of a miner?"

"That is a question that the young man must answer himself."

Mr. Loder made no reply to this.

"Suppose he should fall in love with Gertie?" said Miss Susan, abruptly, and with a meaning glance.

"I can not help it if he does," was her brother's indifferent reply.

"But suppose Gertie should fall in love with him?"

"Well, I can not help that either, as I see."

"Well, suppose—suppose, then, that I should tell you that they are already in love with each other?"

"I can't see as I can help even that, my dear."

"Why, man, what are you thinking about? Have you forgotten that Gertie is our dead brother's child, and that you are her legal and natural guardian?"

"No, I have not forgotten the facts which you mention, my dear sister."

"Then how can you sit there, and with such indifference listen to the statement that the girl has fallen in love with a mere miner?"

"But I do not believe that he is a mere miner."

"If he is not, then, in mercy tell me, what is he?"

"If I find what you have just told me to be true, I shall ask him."

"Well, what then?"

"If I find that he is an honest man, and is not hiding because of some criminal action, but can give a satisfactory reason for his freak, I shall say, if you two are both agreed, all right, go ahead."

"And you dare to tell me this, brother?"

"Yes: I suppose that as long as I ascertain that he is an honest man, for I am satisfied that he is a brave and intelligent one, I can not see but what I have done my duty to my niece."

"But suppose he is a poor man, without a cent in the world?"

"That is Gertie's business alone; she is rich enough for two."

"And you will see a fortune thrown away upon this mysterious adventurer?"

"Some man must marry her, and share her fortune."

"But if this fellow should prove to be nothing but a miner, after all?"

"So much the better, if Gertie loves him; he might be worse."

"You shock me! Your niece marry a miner!"

"There's many a brave and noble heart beats under a miner's blouse, my dear sister; and if this man, Sandie Carmichael, is intelligent, the fact of his being, as you say, nothing but a miner, will make no difference in my estimation of him. I would rather have my niece share her fortune with an honest miner than throw it away upon some well-dressed, lazy fop, who would live upon her and abuse her."

"Well, I want you to understand one thing; I shall protest against this marriage until the last moment."

"You are at perfect liberty to do so, Susan," said Mr. Loder, carelessly, as he arose from his seat, and walked into the house.

Miss Susan Loder felt outraged; her indignation found vent in continued mutterings after the departure of her brother, and her fingers worked rapidly as she knitted away nervously. And so the afternoon passed away; the sun sunk behind the neighboring ridges and peaks, and the shadows of evening began to lengthen, and she sat there knitting away as though her life depended upon the accomplishment of a certain amount of work.

Finally, she raised her eyes, and seemed to become suddenly conscious that the shades of night were rapidly falling.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, "that foolish girl has not returned yet. I wonder where she could have stayed so long!"

Another half hour passed; twilight was succeeded by night; the stars came forth, and still Gertie and Sandie did not return.

"Can it be possible that that mysterious scamp has eloped with her? I have heard of such things! Oh, my goodness! what shall I do? Here, Mike! Mike!" called Aunt Susan.

Mike soon appeared, when Miss Loder said:

"Did you notice the direction my niece took when she went walking this afternoon?"

"I did, ma'am."

"Well, you go at once and look for her; and if you find her, tell her to come home at once; the poor child ought not to be out a moment in the night air."

Mike started away, shaking his head knowingly; while Miss Loder entered the house to tell her brother of his niece's strange and unaccountable absence.

And Susan did not find her brother within the house, nor did she see him until ten o'clock. In the meantime, Mike had returned and reported the ill success of his errand. As Mr. Loder entered the house, his sister rushed toward him, her face convulsed with anxiety and apprehension, exclaiming:

"Brother! brother! Gertie, our darling, is lost!"

"Lost! What do you mean?"

"She went out walking this afternoon with this man—this villain I believe him to be—Carmichael, and has not returned!"

"This is, certainly, strange," said Mr. Loder, thoughtfully.

"Yes, more than strange! it's terrible! the poor girl has been killed, or what is worse, that rascal has run away with her!"

"I will go and look," said Mr. Loder; "but you must not be worried; I guess we will find her all right!"

"Oh, you men! you men! Find her all right, and here it is after ten o'clock now!"

"Come, Mike!" said Mr. Loder, reaching down his rifle, "we will go and see if we can find my niece and her companion."

Hours passed, and Susan paced the floor, becoming more and more excited. Midnight came and passed, and Mr. Loder did not come; and so one, two, three, four o'clock came and went, and not until the morning began to dawn did Mr. Loder return. Then he came, worn, mud-stained, and with a terrible look of anguish upon his face.

"Oh, you have not found her!" screamed Aunt Susan, as she rushed out on the piazza, upon seeing her brother approach.

"No—we have not; but I do not despair yet; a storm swept over the mountains some five miles distant from here, and they may have taken refuge for the night somewhere."

"No; I know that she is killed, or been run away with! I heard the thunder; the storm must have passed over before dark!"

While they were still talking, Mike suddenly exclaimed:

"Who is that coming?"

"Why, it's the old Indian chief," cried the manager. "I am glad to see him coming, for now you can rest assured that we shall receive news!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

WITH slow and stately steps, the old chief drew near. The manager, unable to restrain his impatience, went toward him and said:

"Well, Joe, what news do you bring? Speak quick!"

"Ugh! Come!" replied the old chief.

"Tell me, first, have you seen or heard anything of my niece?"

"No," answered the Indian, shortly.

"Have you seen your friend Sandie?"

"Injun says come!"

"Come where, chief? Don't you know that your friend Sandie, the miner, is missing?"

"Injun knows where Sandie is."

"But my niece—don't you know where she is?"

"No; Injun don't know."

"But my niece and Sandie Carmichael went away together."

"Injun knows that."

"Then why in thunder, you red mystery, don't you speak, and tell all that you know? Do you know anything about my niece?"

"Yes; Brad stole her last night; half kill, may be all kill, Injun's friend, Sandie."

"Oh, God have mercy!" screamed Aunt Susan, who had come near enough to hear the latter part of the conversation. "Gertie in the hands of that outlaw!"

"Yes," said the chief, as though in answer to a question—so taking her involuntary exclamation: "Brad steal white girl last night; Injun kill Brad, sure!"

It would be impossible and useless to attempt to describe the consternation and anguish of both Mr. and Miss Loder. Calmly and stoically the Indian stood and surveyed their irrepresible emotion. Finally he said, impatiently:

"Sandie gone after white girl; Sandie brave man—cunning, like Injun; he find white girl. Manager must come, and bring down dead men. Sandie said so; sent Injun to tell manager."

"What dead men?"

"Two men what help Brad; both dead; Sandie kill them."

"My heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Loder; "there has been a tragedy; and Sandie has slain two men!"

"No tragedy," said the Indian, shaking his head impatiently; "big fight. Miners try to kill Sandie—Sandie kill miners!"

"Go and look for your niece, and let the bodies of the wretches lay and rot!" cried Miss Loder.

"No; I will go and secure help, and bring the bodies into the village. If Sandie is on the track of Brad, he has found him ere this, and will bring him to a fearful reckoning."

Taking the proper appliances and a sufficient number of men, the manager proceeded to the cave, under the guidance of old Joe, secured the bodies, brought them to the village, and dis-

* The writer has frequently seen storms sweep over one portion of a mountain landscape, while the other was bathed in evening sunlight.

patched a messenger for the justice of the peace to hold an inquest.

In the meantime news of the tragedy spread through the village, and was soon conveyed to the miners, when the workmen, in a body, left their work, and crowded down to the village.

It soon became noised about, also, that the two men had been treacherously murdered by Sandie Carmichael; and the men all became furious and mad with rage. Mr. Loder tried to start a contradiction to this awful rumor, but none believed him.

"Ay, lads," the men would exclaim, "it's well for the manager to tell this story to screen the man who has served him so well as an informer; but no such tale will go down with us!"

"Let's away to the manager's house, and tear the informer and murderer from his hiding-place, and hang him like a dog to the nearest tree!"

"You will not find him at my house!" shouted the manager, mounting a cart and trying to gain the men's attention.

"Thou liest! and well thou knowest it?" yelled some of the men, fairly foaming with a demoniac rage.

"But I tell you that I am the greatest sufferer! Thumping Brad, the outlaw, has abducted my niece, and Carmichael has gone to her rescue. It was in her defense that he was compelled to slay these two unfortunate men."

"Go and tell that to yonder cliffs, but 'twill not go down with us. Come, men, let's away and hang the informer!"

"Hold one moment, men, while you have some reason left. Promise me that if you do not find Carmichael at my house, neither my family nor goods shall be injured."

"Ay, that we'll promise, truly. It's the bloody informer that we're after, an' we'll have him ere night falls, the spy and assassin!"

"I warn you, my lads, that you harm neither living persons nor property about my place!"

"We'll harm Sandie Carmichael, where'er we find him!"

And with yells and shouts and threats of vengeance, the men, in a body, started for the manager's house.

Leaving them on their way to seek Sandie, and wreak their vengeance upon him, we will record what befell that individual himself.

The person who entered the cave just as our hero fell under the repeated blows of his antagonist, after having buried his knife in the latter's heart, was the old Indian chief, Joe.

As the Indian felt around warily in the darkness, he said, in a low voice:

"Ugh! Injun come to help friend. If Sandie lives, let him speak."

But to this inquiry the partially stunned Sandie made no reply.

"Guess Injun too late!" said the chief. "Sandie killed!" and as he spoke he ran his fingers over the face of one of the men.

"No Sandie!" he muttered; "miner's dead! Feeling around, his fingers came in contact with the fast-stiffening features of the other miner; and again he muttered, "Ugh! No Sandie!"

Finally, after feeling and groping around, his hand rested upon the living face of the one he was in search of. At once he recognized our hero, and seizing him by the shoulders, he drew him forth from the cave, out into the air, where, under the starlight, his suspicions as to his identity were confirmed.

The fresh air somewhat revived our hero, and he said, in a faint voice:

"Where am I?"

"Old Joe fix you quick! Old Joe Sandie's friend!"

Having heard the trickle of water within the cavern, the Indian entered it, and catching some water in his hands returned and bathed his friend's face until he was fully revived.

As Sandie rose to a sitting position he said:

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Yes, Injun come—come too late."

"Where have you been, Joe, these past three weeks?"

"Down in coal mine—out on mountain."

"How did you happen to discover me here?"

"Found Brad's trail, followed, and found Sandie after Brad had gone! Ugh. White man had big fight!"

"Yes, I have had a terrible fight, and, I fear, all for naught! But, let me see! Gertie is in the hands of Brad! What am I doing here idle, and she may be suffering all the tortures of hell at this moment in that villain's hands!"

Rapidly and concisely Sandie related all that had occurred, and having fully recovered he arose to his feet and said:

"Joe, if you are my friend, discover for me the direction taken by Brad with his captive."

"Injun know that already: Brad went toward mountains—not toward mine."

"How do you know?"

"Injun found his trail—no go toward mine! Injun would have seen! then Injun kill him! Do so yet."

"Point out the trail to me, Joe."

"Come, Injun lead the way! Brad not go far—up on cliff."

"No; you must not go with me. You must return to Mr. Loder's house, and tell him what has occurred, and warn him to send for the bodies of the two poor fellows within the cave."

"Let 'em rot!" said Joe, fiercely.

"No; I can not do that!"

"Then Sandie lose girl—quick! make choice."

"I will follow Brad; you go and warn Mr. Loder."

"Injun go little way—put Sandie on the trail—then Injun go to miners' boss."

"Well, come," said Sandie; and together they started toward the mountain fastnesses.

For two or three hours through the night they traveled, until indications warned them that they were nearing the retreat of the outlaw. So certain and unerring had been Joe's sagacity, that he told, not only the direction which Brad had taken, but pointed out the exact spot where the villain had set his captive from his arms and had compelled her to walk.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHARGING the old chief to return, after having warned Mr. Loder, Sandie bid him begone, and alone, through the darkness, continued upon the track of the outlaw.

Our hero well understood the Indian's powers of endurance, and feeling anxious that Gertie's uncle should be warned at once, he had thus dismissed him, although he would have liked to have kept him, as the old chief's Indian craft would have been of immense advantage in tracking Brad. Still Sandie calculated that he would himself be able to follow the trail, and hoped to speedily overtake the rascal; as the latter would be compelled to travel slowly, as he could not force his captive along beyond a certain gait.

"This time, if I overtake him," murmured Sandie, "it will surely be his life or mine!" and he pushed bravely ahead; when suddenly he was brought to a dead halt by seeing right in his path the figures of three men.

The parties had evidently seen him first, and were waiting for him to advance.

It is unnecessary to reiterate the statement that our hero was as bold as a lion; and after the first momentary start and halt, he boldly proceeded directly toward the three strangers, the foremost of whom, when he came quite near, said:

"Who are you, and what are you doing on the mountains to-night?"

"Who are you, rather?" replied Sandie.

"Our question is unanswered," was the reply, spoken sharply and curtly.

"You are right. Well, I am a miner, in pursuit of a villain and an outlaw, who has abducted the niece of the manager of the mines."

Sandie made this frank reply, as it was not at all probable that the three individuals whom he had so suddenly encountered should be aught else but honest men, as bandits are not indigenous, as a usual thing, to American soil.

"No such man has gone this way."

"I know that he did."

"You are mistaken, as we have descended from above down the only path that is passable."

Sandie drew nearer to the men, and was surprised to discover that they were gypsies. He had often seen gypsies before, and at once remembered that within the last few years several bands had emigrated to America. He also well knew their habits and characteristics, and he said:

"My men, it will stand you in hand to tell me the truth, and aid me, and you shall be well paid for your trouble."

"We have not seen the man you speak of."

"Where is your encampment?"

"Not two hundred yards from here."

"Then the villain I seek has passed by without your knowledge," and Sandie moved past them, merely saying:

"If you come across the man I mention, capture him, and take a tender care of the lady, and you shall be well paid; the outlaw has no money."

"We will mark what you have said," called the gypsy, as Sandie passed on.

For full another hour he proceeded along the mountain path, when at length he came to a place where it ran between two cliffs, leaving a passage so narrow that, in some places it was necessary to squeeze through.

After halting for a moment to see if there was any other path, he was about to proceed again when he was suddenly startled and thrilled with excitement by hearing a wild, triumphant laugh, and a voice which he well recognized.

It was the voice of the outlaw, Brad, and he said:

"Ha! ha! Sandie Carmichael! I have been waiting for you; and I am glad that you have come alone!"

Looking in the direction from whence the voice came, Sandie saw upon an abrupt cliff, a short distance to the right of where he stood, the outlines of a large figure.

"Is that you, Brad?" called Sandie.

"Ay, lad, it's me, at your service; an' I have thee now, mate, where I can make thee feel as though thou couldst wish that thou hadst never been born."

Sandie cocked his pistol. Brad stood upon the cliff, a fair target, even in the darkness; but he heard the click of our hero's pistol, and he called out:

"Have a care, thou hell-hound! I was prepared for thy pistol practice; an' I tell thee if thou'rt fool enough to fire at me, I'll toss thy lady-love down the cliff to thee!"

Sandie's blood ran cold; the pistol which he was just leveling dropped to his side, as Brad added:

"Come, lad, thou'lt not be jealous, I hope, as I'm making love to the manager's niece; an' I must say, though it may rile thee, that the lady is nothing loath to my love-making."

Sandie fairly writhed with anger and chagrin, and, for the first time, curses, deep and terrible fell from his lips; finally, he called out:

"Harm but one hair of that lady's head! speak to her but one insulting word! and I shall rend thee limb from limb!"

"Ha! ha! ha! but those are brave words for a man who stands at the foot of the cliff, to address to the man who stands upon the top, ready to cast his lady-love at her lover's feet! Threats don't fall rightly from thy lips, man!"

Sandie was powerless; the words of the outlaw were too true, and his advantages permitted him to cast down his taunts; and, as though to more bitterly tantalize his hated foe, Brad led Gertie forward, and exhibited her upon the verge of the cliff with his arms cast about her:

A full half hour passed; daylight began to creep through the ravines and crevices of the mountain, and a taunting conversation passed between the two men.

Once, during the time, Sandie had heard Gertie's voice calling upon him to save her, and yet he was powerless. This fact was fast driving the brave youth out of his mind. He had offered Brad untold sums to release the girl, and his propositions had been received with jeers. Several times, in the frenzy of the moment, he had raised his weapon as though about to shoot, but Brad had at once used the form of Gertie as a shield.

Twice he had started to go through the passage and climb the cliff, but Brad called to him that if he moved another step, the girl should be thrown over. Then, again, the villain would point his own pistol at Sandie, and exclaim:

"Look thee here, my lad, how merciful I am. Ay, but I could send a bullet through thy treacherous heart, an' I chose to; an' yet, I let thee live! And, why, thou foul informer? Ay, but that thou mayest witness the progress of my wooing of the manager's fair niece."

Backward and forward Sandie paced like a caged lion, helpless and powerless to save his fair love. Terrible, terrible he felt was the revenge that Brad was enjoying; and fearful were the tortures which rent his own bosom.

Thus the hours passed; the sun arose; the fogs of the morning disappeared, and there, amidst those wild mountain scenes, the two men stood not more than a hundred yards distant from each other, revenge and hate burning in each bosom and flashing from each of their eyes.

Sandie felt that he could endure the agony of the situation but a brief time longer, when, suddenly looking over and beyond the ledge whereon Brad stood with his captive, a sight met his eyes which filled his soul with joy; and on the

impulse of the moment, he came near betraying and defeating the very means which had been ordained to save him further misery and rescue Gertie. Still, he could not restrain a look of hope and triumph which illuminated his countenance upon beholding a well known figure crawling stealthily along the narrow ledge above the one whereon stood the savage outlaw and his victim.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BRAD noticed the look of hope and triumph which so suddenly shone upon Sandie's features, and he also detected the direction of his glances; and instinctively the outlaw turned his head to look above him.

Quick as a flash Sandie's pistol was leveled, his hand was upon the trigger when Brad turned.

And a wild, jeering laugh burst from his lips as he exclaimed:

"Dang it! that was well done, lad, to get me to turn my head; but from this out, mate, thy handsome face will answer for my observations."

Sandie was a quick thinker, and although he had failed to improve his opportunity quick enough, still he saw at a glance that what Brad had supposed to be a ruse would serve to aid the purposes of the faithful friend who had dropped out of sight just in time to prevent his being seen by the outlaw.

"I have had nothing to eat, man; go thou and bring me some food!" called Brad, "some food!"

"Not to you, wretch."

"Then the girl starves with me, lad!"

"I guess not," cried Sandie, as with straining eyes and clasped hands he dropped upon his knees, and looked at the point where Brad was standing. A sight met his gaze which for a moment caused his heart to stand still. The figure upon the ledge of rocks above Brad had crawled along until he arrived at a point directly over him; when suddenly he lowered himself over, let go his hold, and dropped squarely upon the shoulders of the outlaw, bringing the latter to the ground, and with one wild whoop of savage triumph, old Joe, the Indian chief, pinned the surprised and outwitted outlaw to the ground.

Fiercely the fallen giant struggled to free himself; but the old Indian was as tough and strong as himself, and he ceased his struggles entirely, gave up his weapons, and yielded with a sullen silence, when, a moment later, Sandie appeared upon the ledge, and came to the old chief's assistance.

"Thank God!" cried Sandie, rushing to the place where Gertie was kneeling; and raising her to his heart, he added: "Darling, you are saved!"

Brad had been permitted to rise to his feet, but his hands had been tightly bound by old Joe; and after a moment the latter said, addressing Sandie:

"Take girl home quick!"

"What will we do with our prisoner?" inquired Sandie.

"Injun take care of prisoner. Sandie take girl home, quick! The way is long—white girl most dead. Ugh! white girl no like Injun girl."

After a moment's reflection, Sandie decided that the advice of the old chief was wise; and taking Gertie by the hand, he led her carefully and tenderly down the cliff-side.

Gertie was worn and exhausted almost unto death, but her pale face wore an expression of happiness and joy at her fortunate and almost miraculous rescue.

"Aunt and uncle must be crazy with apprehension and terror," she murmured, as they emerged from the narrow passage and started slowly down the mountain path.

"We will soon be with them, darling. Here is a road we can take down the mountain, which is nearer to the main road, and I know a place where we can secure a conveyance."

Sandie was right; and about an hour before noon he reached the house mentioned; and when he arrived there, he found it necessary to remain, as Gertie could travel no further that day.

After the departure of our hero with Gertie, old Joe said to Brad:

"Come, we will go."

With muttered curses and oaths at his ill-fortune, the outlaw slowly started to go down the side of the ledge, with the pistol of the chief held close to his head, to warn him not to attempt to escape.

Thus they descended the cliff; and when they had passed through the narrow passage at the entrance to which Sandie had been halted by Brad, and reached the open space, the Indian said sternly:

"Stop!"

Brad halted, when the old chief drew a large knife from his belt, and advanced toward the outlaw. The latter recoiled, with a countenance convulsed with terror, exclaiming:

"Art thou going to murder me in cold blood?"

"Injun swore to kill you; Injun make big oath; Injun keep it."

"Mercy!" screamed Brad.

"Injun don't know mercy now!"

"Carmichael would not let you murder me."

"Carmichael gone. Injun alone with Brad; that's what Injun wants."

"Oh! don't murder me!"

"No; Injun no murder—Injun kill Brad! Injun have big fight with miner—miner kill Injun all right—Injun kill miner better."

"And dost thou intend to give me a chance for my life?"

"Yes; Injun no murder—Injun will fight!"

It was a desperate moment for Brad; but this was more than he could have expected, as it was his only chance; the red man had shown more mercy than he himself had shown others, especially Sandie. Brad was a desperate villain, and at heart an arrant coward; but under present circumstances, the biggest poltroon could do no less than fight for his life.

He knew that it would be useless to plead with the old chief, and he expressed his willingness to fight.

The old chief produced another knife similar to the one he had just drawn; this he tossed toward Brad.

"Injun cut Brad's hands free."

"You won't murder me?"

"Injun never tell lies—white man lies—Injun never."

Brad extended his hands, and with one gash Joe severed the bonds, and the outlaw was as free and untrammelled as himself.

Brad picked the knife from the ground, where his red foe had tossed it, and the two men stood face to face, knife in hand, warily watching each other with fierce, gleaming eyes, ready to begin the terrible conflict which would only terminate in the death of either one or both of them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Thus it was with Thumping Brad; the outlaw, at heart, as has been demonstrated in the course of our story, was an arrant coward; and although ready at all times to urge others into positions of danger, would generally manage to save himself, and when sometimes cornered, would plainly show his real character. Yet, like men of his ilk, he would steal along through the darkness, and in furtherance of his schemes of vengeance commit murder and other deeds of violence, though he always reserved a chance for escape, and only struck when he thought that he could get away without risk.

But now when standing, knife in hand, face to face with Indian Joe, he knew that there was but one avenue of escape; he could call upon no one for assistance, neither could he fly; there remained but one alternative—he must fight—ay, fight for his life, and a positive knowledge of the situation lent to the scoundrel a nerve which he could have possessed under no other circumstances.

As he raised the knife from the ground where the chief had thrown it, he hissed between his clinched teeth:

"Thou red murderer! it may go hard with thee yet, as thou hast driven me to the fight!"

"Good! Injun's ready! Injun swore to kill Brad—Injun keep his word!" replied the old chief.

"Thou didst say thou wouldst not commit a murder, an' yet there is a fairer way to settle this matter between us!"

"Injun fight Brad! both got knives! what more outlaw want?"

"Thou'st well learned with the use of the knife; I am but a novice; with a pistol I would be more of a match for thee!"

"Injun no trust Brad!"

"Thou'lt no trust me? and what's the difference? an' thou'lt hold a pistol and I but the sword!"

"No; Brad's words are as soft and treacherous as his heart! Brad young—Injun old—Brad big—Injun not so big—Brad's knife sharp—In-

jun's knife sharp—Injun wants no more talk! Brad must fight with knives! Look out! Injun come! ugh!"

As old Joe gave utterance to the final characteristic ugh! the whole expression of his countenance changed, while his body swayed with a graceful movement to and fro, like the lithe, noiseless movement of a cobra when seeking to charm its victim. Then slowly, with his fierce eyes fairly ablaze with a wild savage excitement that agitated his bosom, he advanced one step with the point of his knife extended, while the handle was pressed firmly against his breast. As the Indian advanced with a noiseless tread, his bold body evincing the elasticity of his muscles, Brad stepped backward with his eyes fastened upon the chief, as though expecting momentarily that his antagonist would spring upon him with the bound of a tiger.

Seeing the outlaw move backward, the Indian said, in tones of concentrated native contempt:

"The white man goes backward."

"Ay, but I'm watching thee, thou red-eyed villain!"

"Come, come," hissed the chief, and he leaned his body forward, lowered the point of his knife, and beckoned with his left hand for Brad to advance.

"Come, thou," said Brad, holding his knife tightly clutched in his hand.

"Bah! Injun comes—white man fall back."

"Try me. I'm ready for thee now."

"Good," cried the chief, and with a desperate bound he leaped forward, and made a terrible lunge at the outlaw, which the latter only evaded by a fortunate shy; but seeing that he must now fight, or be unresistingly slaughtered, he gathered himself up and aimed a wicked blow at the chief.

But the Indian dodged, and a second time made a lunge at the outlaw; and so quick was his movement, and so certain his aim that his foe failed to dodge it successfully, and his knife made a fearful gash in Brad's shoulder.

The outlaw gave utterance to a roar of terror and agony, succeeded by a volley of oaths, as, impelled by rage and a thoroughly aroused instinct of self-preservation, he rushed at the red warrior, who, after striking the successful blow, retreated a step or two, uttering a suppressed chuckle of triumph.

The sight of blood seemed to transform both men into perfect demons. The Indian alternately laughed and ground his teeth with the intensity of the excitement, while Brad foamed at the mouth, and shook his head like a maddened bull-dog.

In an instant the two combatants came together, and the arms of both men rose and fell with lightning-like rapidity, as they cut and gashed at each other with resistless fury.

The rich, warm blood now spouted from several terrible wounds which the old chief had received; one terrible thrust had laid open his cheek with a ghastly wound from his cheek-bone to his chin, and as the crimson fluid fairly blinded him, Brad yelled in triumph, as he shouted, in a hoarse voice:

"Aha! thou red fiend, and thou'rt my muton, after all."

The Indian could not speak; but his eyes still flashed defiance, and his thrusts were made with unabated swiftness and energy.

The dreadful fight went on. Both men now became more wary, as both evidently perceived that a few moments must decide the combat; and they began to feel a weakness coming over them, owing to great loss of blood which both had suffered. Either felt that any moment he might fall, fainting and exhausted, upon the earth, which was now red with gore like the floor of a slaughter-pen.

At length the arms of the two men which held their bloody knives became locked, and a different turn was given to the struggle. Brad, who felt that he was the strongest, sought to hold on to the arm-lock, while with his feet he should be able to throw the old chief down; but the latter was still too nimble for him, and finally the outlaw reached forward and tried to beat the chief to insensibility with his great, ponderous hand. But again was he baffled, and started back with a more blasphemous oath than he had yet uttered, when old Joe finally succeeded in wrenching himself loose from his giant grasp.

This fearful struggle had lasted fully ten minutes—a long time for such a terrible and bloody combat—and both men were glad of an instant's breathing spell. And as they withdrew with their gleaming eyes still fastened upon

each other, no two more unsightly and ghastly objects could the eye of a witness rest upon.

Our readers may think that it would be utterly impossible for two strong men to engage in a combat as above described, and both not be literally hacked to pieces. But there are well authenticated accounts of contests with knives having taken place in the presence of numerous witnesses which have lasted for a much longer time.

The writer once met a man in Texas who was one of two who fought with knives for fully thirty minutes; and one of them survived, though covered, at the time the writer met him, with seventeen plainly marked scars of wounds received during the fight.

When surprise was expressed that both had not been killed within the first few minutes, the hunter replied:

"Look here, stranger; you don't suppose that when a fellow's engaged in a fight, and a knife cutting through his skin, that he's going to stand still and let his enemy shove it in further, do yer? No, no; a twist or a squirm will get you out of danger from that; and the other chap ain't got much time to waste in driving his knife home, unless he's got a dead advantage. Now, I'll tell yer: I did not finish my man until he got weak from loss of blood, and then I drove the knife home to bone; and that thar bone cut was the one that killed him; he'd a got well of all ther rest!"

Nearly three minutes elapsed before either of the two combatants, Brad or Joe, made the least movement toward a renewal of the fight.

Then Brad, who saw the chief reel and stagger as though about to fall, cautiously advanced to deal the finishing blow as soon as the red man should go down.

Seeing Brad advancing toward him, the old chief seemed to make one desperate effort, and moved forward to renew the struggle; but he advanced but two steps, when, down, with a deep groan, he fell upon his knees.

A yell of triumph burst from Brad's lips; in his mad eagerness he forgot his wariness, and leaped forward with his knife uplifted, when suddenly, like a flash, the Indian sprang to his feet right under the uplifted arm of the outlaw, and with a wild whoop, drove his knife home to the hilt in Brad's heart.

The giant swayed an instant, then with one heavy groan fell forward on his face a corpse. The Indian's seeming weakness had only been a ruse, coming of a race distinguished for their cunning; in the last moment, feeling that the chances were against him, as Brad's strength seemed the least impaired, he had resorted to this ingenious ruse to throw the outlaw off his guard, and had thereby slain him.

But the victory won, and the excitement over, he, too, fell prostrate, and insensible upon the body of his late antagonist.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WE left the miners raving with excitement and burning with anger toward Sandie Carmichael, on the way to the manager's house for the purpose of wreaking their vengeance upon him.

They were all resolved that if they should find him, to practice at once what has come to be known in this country as Lynch law.

Brad, as our readers have been informed, was looked upon by them as a martyr to the rights of the miners; and since our hero's testimony at the trial, he had not a friend among his former comrades; all looked upon him as a traitor, and a betrayer of his mates, if not for gold, at least for flattering and future chances of preferment in the mines.

But it mattered not to them what were the causes or inducements for his treachery, he was looked upon as an undoubted traitor, and the members of the secret brotherhood had sworn vengeance against him.

Those who were not ready to take part in acts of actual violence, still lent a tacit encouragement to the others, and were open-mouthed in calling him an informer and in asserting that he deserved death.

The women also were outspoken in their denunciations, and were not backward in urging their sons and husbands to hang the wretch upon whose head lay the blood of three of the miners, each of whom had left a widow and children to the care and commiseration of their former comrades; and when the crowd started for the manager's house it was greatly augmented by the women and children who joined in the general cry for justice and vengeance.

Mr. Loder, fearing bloodshed, and finding himself unable to appease, intimidate, or control the excited men, dispatched to the town for assistance; at the same moment, he had sent a messenger to his sister, warning her to leave the house, while he himself gathered a few men and started to follow the crowd, that he might post sentinels in every direction leading toward his home, so that they might intercept and warn Sandie, in case he might approach, of the danger that menaced him.

"This time the rascal and informer shall die!" shouted one of the men, as he passed an incongruous and disorderly procession through the village way along the road toward the manager's house.

"Ay!" yelled another; "an' had we heeded Brad's warning, the lives of our comrades would have been saved!"

"It's death to him now, for certain, the foul murderer!" cried still another. Thus threatening, cursing, and arguing, the wild mob reached Mr. Loder's house.

Mr. Loder had hurried on ahead of them, and after having posted his sentinels, hastened back to the house, and when the miners arrived, he stood upon the front piazza to receive them.

"Have I ever lied to you, men?" he said.

"Then don't begin now, sir," answered one of the men.

"I never wish to; but I do wish to save my property, and I have a proposition to make to you."

"Speak out, then, sir; but be quick, as it's only time, we believe, that you are trying to gain, to aid the flight or hide the informer."

"I told you an hour ago, and I tell you now, that Sandie Carmichael has not been beneath my roof since yesterday afternoon."

"An' it's now thou'rt lying, if before this nothing but the truth fell from thy lips."

"On my honor as a man, a Christian, and a gentleman, I am telling the truth; and if you will but act with a little reason, I will convince you."

"Well, speak, sir; we are ready to listen if thou'lt not be too long."

"Let three of your number come and search my house; you will then be satisfied that the man whose innocent blood you seek is not there; and then I will tell you that I will have a meeting called of the owners of the mine, and urge upon them the righteousness of paying the same rate as is paid in any other mine in the country."

When men are most exasperated, there still remains one passion which is ever dominant; with the wealthy, it is a prospect of increased gains, and with the laborer, higher wages; and even in this moment of rage and excitement, the miners greeted the manager's last promise with an outburst of cheers.

This latter phase of affairs so far mollified temporarily the wrath of the men that they held a few moments' consultation, when three of them stepped forward and said that they did not doubt the manager's statement, but that to appease the majority it would be necessary for them to make the search, but that they would do it with dispatch and decorum, and put the inmates of the house to as little inconvenience as possible.

In less than ten minutes the three men came forth from the house and stated that Sandie Carmichael, the murderer and informer, was not there, and that after a thorough examination they were convinced that the manager had rightly informed them.

After calling upon Mr. Loder for a re-statement of his promise to intercede with the owners and directors of the mine, the motley crowd of men, women, and children, more honest than cultivated, and less wise than enthusiastic, returned to the village.

Upon that same day all idea of work in the mines was abandoned; in the afternoon the county coroner arrived; a jury was sworn, the bodies of the dead men were viewed, and the formal inquest was adjourned for a week in accordance with the advice of Mr. Loder, who stated that it would be dangerous to hold it until the present wild excitement had subsided; and further, that time would be required to get the witnesses together.

So the day passed. It was long after night-fall when the manager returned, wearied and exhausted, to his home, hoping to learn something of the fate of his niece. And in this latter desire, he was not disappointed, as less than an hour previous to his return, a boy had arrived with information of the safety of Gertie

and Sandie, and with a few particulars of the exciting events which had occurred.

Upon the following day the funeral of the two miners took place; the whole village turned out and joined in the sad procession which followed the remains to their last resting-place.

In the meantime, the manager had sent a messenger to Sandie, warning him not to return to the village until he should receive a notice to do so, as in the present state of excitement nothing but evil would come of his presence; and he also requested that his niece might also remain, if comfortably situated, for a few days until matters should become more settled.

It so happened that the events recorded caused the mines to be totally deserted for three whole days, but upon the day succeeding the funeral, the men resolved to resume work, and at the usual hour assembled at the mouth of the shaft for the purpose of descending.

The men all seemed subdued, and there was a quiet solemnity in their demeanor, as though each and all were laboring under a weird presentiment of some terrible calamity.

Yet there was no hesitation; after the usual delay required for the descent of the five boys, the men entered the car and were rapidly let down into the dark depths and narrow avenues, where in low, slimy chambers, by hard and wearing toil, they earned their daily bread.

It was a lovely day; the mountain peaks reared their heads toward heaven, freed from the usual mists that surrounded them, and shot aloft bare and rugged in the clear, calm light of one of summer's balmy days.

Alone upon the surface, all were engaged as usual about their daily avocations; and it appeared as though a special calm of both man and nature pervaded every nook and corner, as a blessed succession to the scenes of riot and turmoil which had prevailed for the last few weeks.

Suddenly a strange, rumbling sound was heard, and the cheeks of those upon the surface surrounding the mine became blanched with an expression of terror and agony, which too well indicated their instant knowledge of the cause of the explosions which were now heard with increased frequency, while great volumes of black smoke came hissing and rolling up the shaft.

The demon of the mines had broken his shackles—the terrible, the fearful, the death-dealing fire-damp was reveling in its horrible feast of destruction and death!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE fire-damp! Thousands are the graves which yearly open throughout the world to receive the victims of this strange, mysterious scourge of the mines, and its twin-monster, the choke-damp!

These terrible elements of death are invisible to the eye, but they make their fearful presence felt by all the other human organs. They issue from the caverns and recesses of the mines with a loud cry, or a continual hissing, that is horrible to hear. They smell ghastly and grave-like. You can feel their clammy presence on your brow, and if you inhale their breath, you must die.

They fly swifter than birds; and, pursuing their victims, they surround and slowly smother them, or else blow them instantly into atoms.

One of these foul elements, the choke-damp, so-called because it suffocates or chokes its victims, is sufficiently dangerous and terrible to be dreaded; but its companion evil, the fire-damp, is more dangerous and more to be feared, because it explodes and burns, and when once upon a rampage, escape from its awful dangers is very rare.

It is not necessary, in the limits of our story, to attempt to explain how these gases are formed; that, in itself, would prove an interesting study for those who are of an investigative turn of mind. We shall only speak of them in so far as they may have a bearing upon our tale.

This fatal gas, known as the fire-damp, sometimes lies between the crevices of the coal in the mine; oftener it is in the coal itself, and is not released until the coal is burned.

If our readers have ever seen bituminous coal burning, they have noticed the little bright jets of gas blazing with a little hissing noise.

When the coal is laid bare by the miner's pick, the fire-damp hisses out, and the neighborhood is permeated by a bad smell.

This is what the miners call "singing coal," and it sings many a poor fellow to his last sleep.

When a crevice between the different runs of

coal is struck, the fire-damp bursts forth in a great body and fills up the mine so suddenly that the men can not escape or extinguish their lights, and thus explosions take place. Sometimes these crevices connect with others, and then there is a continuous flow of gas for months. Then the mines are filled with gas to such an extent that the miners hardly dare approach the entrance, and it is almost certain death to go into them.

The fire-damp explodes just like powder, and even with more terrible effect sometimes, for the whole air is then converted into one white cloud of flame. It fires the timbers and loose coal in the mine, and consumes them. When this flaming gas is exhausted, it is followed by the choke-damp again, and it becomes necessary to put the ventilating engines to work to purify the air; but generally ere this is done every living soul that may have been in the mine at the time of the explosion is either smothered or burned to a crisp.

Those of our readers who have been upon a ship at sea, and have suddenly been aroused by the fearful cry of fire, can form some idea of what brief moments of agony the human soul can endure. Fire at sea! What presents itself to the imagination with equal horror? Upon a frail bark, above us the calm, blue sky, all about the equally calm, green waters; but in our midst the roaring flames of torture and destruction; with death, certain death, on every side! But, reader, stay! even in this fearful moment the passenger on the burning ship has a consolation; he can cast his eyes heavenward, and feel the warmth of a blessed hope inspired in his bosom at the sight of that blue canopy behind which our faith teaches us is an eternal home of rest and peace. And then, when the flames press close upon us, and death is inevitable, an easy and painless mode of exit from earth and its terrors presents itself in the calm depths of old ocean.

But neither of these mitigating promises to the dreadful horror of his fate has the poor miner. Sometimes a large body of men who hear the first explosion which portends the coming horror, rush toward the foot of the shaft, but are met by the suffocating choke-damp, and with cries of despair, they retreat back into some distant chamber and seal themselves in, and then await for hours and days a final rescue or a terrible death.

And their agony is long drawn out; they can hear the shock of the demon fire-damp, as it rushes from chamber to chamber, from crevice to crevice, and through some leak, steals in and they catch a faint odor of that fatal after-evil which portends a less rapid but a more horrible lingering and agonizing death. The light of heaven is shut out from them; they are surrounded by the black, slimy walls, from which comes the constant drip, drip of the oozing water; a fit type of the slow misery which is to precede a final death of horror.

"The fire-damp! the fire-damp! there has been an explosion in the mine! the men were all down there!" and a hundred other exclamations fell from the mouths of excited men and terror-stricken women and children, as they rushed wildly toward the shaft from whence the smoke was still issuing with a sullen roar which was simply awful to behold.

It was a terrible sight which met the eye of Mr. Loder, the manager, as he galloped upon the scene. Women were screaming in anguish, and in their frenzy would rush headlong toward the mouth of the pit, and were only driven back by the most determined efforts of the men. The news of the calamity spread, and crowds began to arrive on horseback and in wagons, and six hours after the first explosion there was gathered a vast multitude, and from the great throng arose a constant murmur, while ever and anon a shrill cry was heard, and a woman with disheveled hair clasping an infant in her arms, and leading several other children by the hand, would break through the crowd, making wild, incoherent inquiries whether any news had come up from the mine.

But there were none who could speak one word of cheering comfort; the black smoke, although less dense in volume, still continued to issue from the mouth of the shaft.

To the wives and relatives of those down in the fatal depths, the men who were working and watching with pale, worn faces at the mouth of the shaft, would speak words of hopefulness, saying: "Don't give up, my dear women, the men may have intrenched themselves in such and such a chamber; they may

all be safe, and as soon as the choke clears away, we will send men down to the rescue."

But when strangers came, and in low, hushed voices made inquiries, the same brave fellows would shake their heads, and reply in hoarse whispers:

"There is but little hope. The chances are that all of the men are dead ere this, or are slowly but surely suffocating."

And thus the day wore on; the shadows of night came apace, and like the mournful howl of the watch-dog, the despairing moans of anguish of women sounded upon the dewy air.

Prayers were openly offered; cries, piteous cries to Heaven for mercy, were mingled with the shrill cries of children, and the agonized sobs of strong men.

None slept through the silent watches of the hot night, all kept solemn ward and watch.

At about midnight a report flew through the immense throng that the shaft was clear, and a descent was about to be made, and a wild cheer burst from a thousand throats. While these huzzas were still ringing upon the air, a remarkable scene was occurring at the mouth of the shaft. The outside boss had just announced that an attempt was to be made to go down into the mine.

"I will go," he said, in firm tones, "who will go with me?"

For a moment there ensued an ominous silence; at length a young man stepped forth, and said, while his face fairly glistened under the light of the stars:

"I will!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"I WILL for another!" spoke up a middle-aged man.

"No, not thou! An' I'll go down in thy stead," interposed a large-framed, gray-headed man, as the tears gushed from his eyes. "Thou'rt a father and a husband," he continued, "an' I have but my own life to lose, and none to mourn after me."

Here spoke up the noble miner—here spoke the brave, self-sacrificing hero. To go down that fatal shaft was almost certain death—a terrible death at that! Here is the story of Damon and Pythias—a true history—the noble heroism of Pythias when he took Damon's place upon the scaffold shone but dimly in a heroic light beside the genuine offer of the old miner.

After a moment, another stepped forward and said: "I will go down also."

"Thank thee, lad, but three are enough. Come, my mates, let's down to the rescue of our comrades."

A terrible silence prevailed; the whole multitude became suddenly hushed, and not a sound was heard but the rattling of the chain that held the car as it descended into the black depths of the shaft.

Anxiously, and with bated breath, the appointed man watched the signal; and a glad smile broke over his face, as he said in a low tone:

"All right so far, they have signaled!" and again came the cheering assurance; then succeeded a few moments of breathless interest and anxiety; no signal came.

The car had arrived at the bottom.

"Do they signal?" inquired Mr. Tilton.

"No, sir," was the faint reply.

"Wait a moment, and if you get no signal, let the car come up."

A moment passed.

"Raise the car!" said Mr. Tilton, in a subdued voice.

Slowly the wheel began to turn, and the car started for the surface; paler and paler grew each face, and as the car drew near the top, trembling forms bent over the edge of the shaft, and peered down to see whether it brought back dead or living freight.

At length it was brought to the surface, and a cry of anguish burst from the lips of those about the mouth of the pit, and was taken up by the throng, and then came the fatal words:

"They're dead! they have been suffocated by the choke-damp!" and strong men wept, as, tenderly, one after the other the dead forms of their self-immolated companions were lifted from the basket.

Efforts were made toward resuscitation, but failed; the deadly damp had effectually done its work, and three victims more were now to be added to the scourge, the mystery of the fire-damp! and thus far only Heaven knew how many more victims lay down in the dismal, prisoned depths of the mine.

Hours passed—hours fraught with more fearful agony than often falls to human minds to suffer. Daylight came. Efforts had been made to purify the mine, and again volunteers were called for to descend.

Two young men answered to the call; but in less than seven minutes from the time they left the surface, with the life-blood coursing healthfully through their veins, they were drawn up, and their pulse-beats had ceased forever; and their lips, frozen in death, could not tell at what depth death—horrible death—had overtaken them.

Again the purifying process began, and at noon the call came, "Who will go down now?"—in other words, who will be the next victim?

This time there came no response; each looked into the face of the other, but none dared say "I will go."

A terrible, awful silence pervaded the vast, anxious assemblage, but none seemed willing to go down to certain death. At length one spoke: "Why sacrifice more lives? The men below are beyond succor. It would be cruel to send another down to certain doom."

And this feeling prevailed. Tears gushed from the eyes of some, while shrieks and moans issued from the lips of others.

A pall of death overhung that great throng of men, women and children, when suddenly a young man came pushing through the crowd, and, as some of the villagers gazed upon his pale, noble features, a murmur of indignation burst forth, and deep-toned voices said:

"There goes the informer! There goes the murderer! There goes the traitor Sandie Carmichael!"

But our hero heeded not what was said, but walked, with proud steps and flashing eyes, straight up to the mouth of the shaft.

Then he spoke:

"Has any one been down the shaft?"

"Yes; five men."

"And they came up dead?"

"Yes."

"Then listen to me. I have been branded as a traitor, an informer, and a murderer. Now, in the sight of Heaven, I proclaim my innocence. If I speak falsely may I never come up from that shaft alive. If true, may I be the means of rescuing my mates, if any of them be still alive. I will go down the shaft, and I'll go alone."

A wild cry sounded from hundreds of voices, as our hero stepped forward, and, in the face of warnings not to go down, said, in a voice both firm and cheerful:

"Let the car go down!"

The man watched the signal rope, and at regular intervals came the glad sign that thus far all was right. Finally it reached the bottom, and the signal came aloft that all was right.

Then began a season of fearful suspense. A half hour passed; every eye was fixed upon the signal rope, but it hung motionless.

Another half hour passed.

"Let the car come up," said Mr. Tilton.

It came up, but it was empty; down it went again, but ere it had half reached the bottom the signal rope was seen to move. The news was communicated from one to the other, and a frenzied shout of praise and thanksgiving arose.

"God bless Sandie Carmichael! he has proved his innocence," was the reply from mouth to mouth.

The car reached the bottom of the shaft; a moment—a terrible moment—passed, then came the signal.

"Let her come up."

Slowly she ascended; anxious faces peered over the side of the pit; the car came in sight, and strong men staggered back and fainted, while others sent forth the glad cry:

"They're saved! there are men in the car!" and there was music in the creak of the pulley wheel, as the car came up, and in a moment half a dozen pale, terror-stricken men were lifted from it, and men, women, and children crowded about them, and a glad shout of praise and thanksgiving ascended to God when the news circulated that in all probability every man would be saved.

This glad hope was verified. Car load after car load was brought into life, and as they came to, the story of the rescue became known.

When the first explosion took place they had rushed for the pit, but were driven back by the choke-damp. Then they fled to a distant chamber, and sealed themselves in, and thus for twenty-six hours they had remained, hoping and praying. At length the choke-damp began to penetrate their retreat. Gradually one after

another was overcome and fell helpless to the ground, when suddenly blows were heard against the barricades which they had not dared to disturb, and Sandie Carmichael, their brave rescuer, came in among them, followed by a draught of reviving air.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

At length the last car came up. Save one, all had ascended, but the noble young man, who had been branded traitor, informer, murderer, and whose blood had been sought but a few hours previously by those very men whom he had rescued from a terrible death; because, one half hour later and the choke-damp would have done its work, and succor would have been too late.

Sandie remained below, alone, until the car came down; he entered, and, after his exhausting exertions in leading the weaker men to the shaft-hole, he began to ascend toward light and day once again.

The last car reached the entrance; Sandie stepped forth, and then the welkin rang with a cry which ascended to the sky, and must have penetrated even beyond, until the angels heard it and folded their wings and looked glad at such an exhibition of humanity when aroused to its fullest capacity of heaven-born nobility.

Thousands of our readers have been upon the battle-field, and after a hard day's battle, amid the thunder of cannon and the bursting of shells and the rattle of musketry have heard, at length, the cry rise above the din and roar of battle:

"They fly, and the day is ours!"

Then they have heard the roar of the cannon cease, or, only in the distance, have listened to the rumbling of the flying foe, and then has succeeded the one wild hallelujah of victory. To them we need not tell of the wild enthusiasm which prevailed around that shaft, nor of the glad hosannas which were re-echoed by the distant hills and ridges. It was a grand chorus, that can be heard but once, and then forever remembered; but such a greeting met Sandie Carmichael, and he was borne away upon the shoulders of a dozen stalwart men.

Still the dead heroes were not forgotten. Biers were constructed, flowers were gathered from the hedges and tenderly thrown upon them, while, with solemn steps, their comrades bore them to their former homes, the women marching in front, and laying the dust of the road-way with their copious tears.

* * * * *

Three months have passed. Crowds of gayly decked children are dodging in and out of their humble homes, and soon their parents follow, and taking them by the hand, join in a joyful procession, which is wending its way in one direction.

What means this holiday attire? Why these joyful, happy faces? Where is this great throng marching to?

It is a holiday; and it is more; it is the wedding-day of Sandie, the miner, and Gertie Loder, the manager's niece.

Upon the green, in front of the manager's new mansion, which has risen upon the site of the one which was burned in a moment of passion, is gathered a great crowd.

Soon the doors are thrown open, and the bridal-party come forth. Prominent in the train can be seen old Joe, the Indian chief; and there, in the presence of the great happy multitude, Sandie Carmichael and Gertie Loder are made husband and wife.

A great, grand feast followed, like unto the days of old, when the first-born of some great house, the descendant of a long line of lords, has in similar manner been united in marriage to a lady equally high-born.

And why should not an equally glorious pageant attend the espousals of our hero and heroine? for those who stood upon the broad balcony and heard the clergyman's words for the first time learned a great secret. When the question came, "Wilt thou take this woman for thy wedded wife," the clergyman did not say Sandie Carmichael, but addressed our hero thus:

"Sanderson Carmichael, Lord Osmond and Marquis d'Arville"—there, our secret is out, and our story is told.

Two weeks later a handsome man and a beautiful woman stood upon the deck of an outward-bound steamer gazing upon the receding shores of New York Harbor. The lady spoke:

"Sandie," she said, "you once told me that you had never worked at any other occupation but that of a miner."

"Dear one, I told you truly," as he smiled pleasantly down upon her; "that was my first and only occupation, and thus far, my record as a miner is the proudest and the best of my whole career."

"My husband, what drove you to become a miner?"

A shadow passed over Sandie's face. At length he said:

"Gertie darling, you have always trusted me; you pledged me your troth when you thought me poor and humble and a workman; not until the day preceding our marriage did I tell you the secret of my birth. Dear one, you must trust me once more, but the day will come when you shall learn why Sandie Carmichael toiled in the depths of the mine."

"Sandie, I am willing to wait."

"Thank you," replied her husband. "And from hence let it be our mission to teach those, who gather around their comfortable fires when the wind roars about them in midwinter, how great are the dangers, how exhausting the labors, and how heroic and noble the souls of

those who spend the brightness of their days where a ray of sunshine never can be found."

And as the noble steamer glided out into the broad Atlantic, in a low, clear tenor voice Sandie, who fully appreciated the truth of the sentiments conveyed in the song, sung:

"I am a jovial collier lad, and blithe as blithe can be,
For let the times be good or bad, it's all the same to me;

'Tis little of the world I know, and careless of its ways,
For where the dog-star never glows I wear away my days.

CHORUS.

"Down in a coal mine, underneath the ground,
Where a gleam of sunshine never can be found;
Digging dusky diamonds all the season round,
Down in the coal mine underneath the ground.

"My hands are horny, large, and black with working
in the vein.
And like the clothes upon my back, my speech is
rough and plain;
Well, if I stumble with my tongue, I've one excuse to
say,
'Tis not the collier's heart that's wrong, 'tis the head
that goes astray.

CHORUS.—Down in a coal mine, etc.

"At ever shift, be 't soon or late, I haste my bread to
earn.
And anxiously my kindred wait and watch for my
return,
For death, that levels all alike, whate'er the rank
may be,
Amid the fire and damp may strike and fling its
darts at me.

CHORUS.—Down in a coal mine, etc.

"How little do the great ones care who are at home
secure,
What hidden dangers colliers dare, what hardships
they endure;
The bright fires their mansions boast to cheer them-
selves and wives
Mayhap were kindled at the cost of jovial colliers' lives.

CHORUS.—Down in a coal mine, etc.

"Then cheer up, lads, and make ye much of every joy
ye can,
But let your mirth be always such as best becomes a
man;
However fortune turns about, we'll still be jovial
souls,
For what would New York be without the lads that
look for coals."

CHORUS.—Down in a coal mine, etc.

THE END.

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